



811 Lowell

STORAGE

Ballads for sale

# SAN DIEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

## LIBRARY RULES

**TIME**—Books may be kept 14 days and once renewed for the same time, except when labeled Seven Day Book. Seven Day Books May Not be Renewed.

**RENEWALS**—To renew a book by ~~mail~~ postal, give author, title, class number, your library card number, and date due.

**FINES**—~~Five~~ cents a day will be charged for each ~~adult~~ book kept over time. ~~One cent a day is charged for each juvenile book or rent book.~~

**DAMAGES**—Injury to the book from tearing, penciling, unusual soiling or other ill-usage, will be charged to the card owner. Please report to us when a mutilated book is issued to you.

**CARDS**—The borrower's card must be brought whenever a book is taken or returned.

Please report at once change of address.

## WARNING

There is both a State and a City fine and imprisonment for anyone who mutilates this piece of City property.



3 1336 00326 7508







# BALLADS FOR SALE

BY  
AMY LOWELL



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

7771 6



COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

OPEN BOOK  
YMARIST CLUB

**The Riverside Press**  
CAMBRIDGE • MASSACHUSETTS  
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



Hutton  
8.20.27  
166

BALLADS FOR SALE

Fresh, New Ballads, with the Ink Scarce  
Dried upon Them

*Have a ballad, good people,  
A sheet of song-words just pulled from the press.  
A new song all a-flutter in the wind.  
Did you hear the drums and fife,  
And the boys and girls calling down the side streets?  
Throw up your windows,  
You, who live in the Square,  
For I am passing by your doors  
With sheets and sheets of songs,  
To tickle your tears and your laughter  
And set your feet a-jigging.*

*Will you have a penny posy of daisies and dandelions,  
and true love under a hedge?  
For another penny, I can give you roses,  
Fountains, fish-ponds,  
and a dim old palace streaked with moonlight.  
If the sea is your choice,  
You must give me silver.*

*The sea is a hard thing to get into a song.*

*Martial ballads bring silver too.*

*They are a bit out of style,*

*But I have two or three,*

*with guns popping like the Fourth of July,*

*Printed in red ink,*

*with a skull and cross-bones at the corners.*

*Then there is a merry song of a moor and a cocoanut,*

*and a clown who went to Heaven in a fire-  
balloon.*

*Ha! Ha! You will hold your sides,*

*and all for a bit of white silver.*

*But it is yellow gold I must have for love songs,*

*A drop of blood for a drop of gold,*

*and fourteen lines is a guinea. /*

*See the wind flutter my songs,*

*They almost sing themselves out here in the sunshine.*

*Step up, good people,*

*And buy a fine ballad crisp from the press,*

*with the ink scarce dried upon it.*

## CONTENTS

### BALLADS FOR SALE

TO A GENTLEMAN WHO WANTED TO SEE THE FIRST DRAFTS OF MY POEMS IN THE INTERESTS OF PSY- CHOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO THE WORKINGS OF THE CREATIVE MIND	3
--	---

ON LOOKING AT A COPY OF ALICE MEYNELL'S POEMS, GIVEN ME, YEARS AGO, BY A FRIEND	9
--	---

WHO HAS NOT, CANNOT HAVE	14
--------------------------	----

MID-ADVENTURE	16
---------------	----

CORRESPONDENCE	19
----------------	----

TO A LADY OF UNDENIABLE BEAUTY AND PRACTISED CHARM	21
---	----

AND SO, I THINK, DIOGENES	22
---------------------------	----

MESDAMES ATROPOS AND CLIO ENGAGE IN A GAME OF SLAP-STICK	26
---	----

A COMMUNICATION	31
-----------------	----

THE IMMORTALS	34
---------------	----

APOTHEOSIS	38
------------	----

BEHIND TIME	47
-------------	----

## GOUACHE PICTURES OF ITALY

PALAZZO CONTARINI	63
THE LIME AVENUE	65
THE WATER STAIR	67
THE STABLE	69
FÊTE AT CASERTA. THE QUEEN OF NAPLES RE- CEIVES	71
SANTA SETTIMANA	73
THE AMBASSADOR	75
FROM NICE TO ONEGLIA	77
VILLA CAPOUANA	79
THE CHURCH OF SANTA CHIARA, NAPLES	81
IN THE CAMPAGNA	83

## PORTRAITS, PLACES, AND PEOPLE

TO ELEONORA DUSE. IN ANSWER TO A LETTER	87
TO ELEONORA DUSE. 1923	90
THE MADONNA OF CARTHAGENA	95
TUNE	113
GRIEVANCE	116
PARADOX	118

HIPPOCRENE	120
THORN PIECE	123
ON CHRISTMAS EVE	127
A NEW YEAR'S CARD	131
FACT	133
HERALDIC	134
QUINCUNX	135
CARREFOUR	136
GRANADILLA	137
CAUSTIC	138
ONE! TWO! THREE.	139
ALTERNATIVES	144
THRENODY	145
TANKA	146
REFLECTION	147
PASTIME	148
AFTER AN ILLNESS	151
"RODE THE SIX HUNDRED"	154
THE SILENT HUSBAND	155
THE "PLUM-BLOSSOM" CONCUBINE WRITES TO THE EMPEROR MING HUANG	156

OLD EXAMINATION HALL — CHINA	157
PILLAR PRINTS	159
TO TWO UNKNOWN LADIES	161
WRITTEN ON THE REVERSE	173
SILHOUETTE WITH SEPIA BACKGROUND	179
AQUATINT FRAMED IN GOLD	182
MINIATURE	185
EASEL PICTURE	187
THE IRONY OF DEATH	189
THE GRAVE	191
THE MIRROR	193
PORTRAIT OF AN ORCHESTRA LEADER	194
PORTRAIT	195
MAGNOLIA GARDENS	197
A SOUTH CAROLINA FOREST	199
CIRCUS TENTS BY LAKE MICHIGAN	201
ST. LOUIS. JUNE	205
THE REVENGE	208
CHILL	214
SNOW	217
OLD SNOW	221

NEW HEAVENS FOR OLD	222
THE SIBYL	225
THE MADMAN	227
DIRGE	233
ANECDOTE	237
EPITHALAMIUM IN THE MODERN MANNER	241
POINTS OF VIEW	243
SHOOTING THE SUN	244
THE CUSTOMER	246
THE SEWING-BOOK	252
STILL LIFE	255
BALLAD OF GRINNING DEATH	256
POETIC JUSTICE	263
TO FRANCESCA BRAGGIOTTI	264
DANCE FIGURE	266
JAZZ DANCE	271
PROPER INVECTIVE	278
DISSONANCE	289
THE BOOK OF STONES AND LILIES	290
STALACTITE	294
THE SPLENDOUR FALLS FROM CASTLE WALLS	295



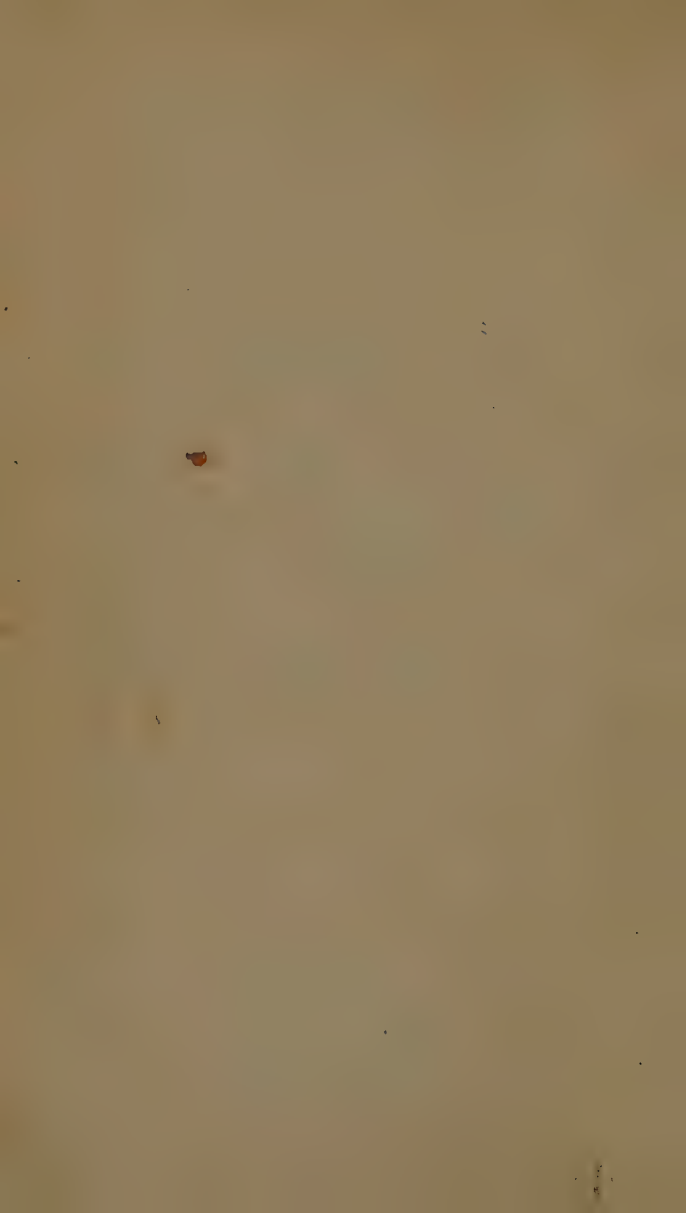
## SONGS OF THE PUEBLO INDIANS

WOMEN'S HARVEST SONG	303
BASKET DANCE	305
WOMEN'S SONG OF THE CORN	306
PRAYER FOR A PROFUSION OF SUNFLOWERS	308
PRAYER FOR LIGHTNING	308
FLUTE-PRIEST SONG FOR RAIN	309

Thanks are due to the editors of *The North American Review*, *The Atlantic*, *The Bookman*, *The Dial*, *The Century*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The Anglo-French Review*, *The Double Dealer*, *The Yale Review*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *Books*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The International Book Review*, *The Independent*, *Chimaera*, *Coterie*, *The Forge*, *Prairie*, *The Reviewer*, *Rhythmus*, *Romance*, *Tempo*, *The Harp*, *The Unpartizan Review*, *Varsity*, *Voices*, and *The Forum*.

Acknowledgement should also be made to the editors of *A Miscellany of American Poetry*, *American Poetry — 1925*, *The Year Book of the Charleston Poetry Society*, and, also, to Sunwise Turn, Inc.

# BALLADS FOR SALE



TO A GENTLEMAN WHO WANTED TO  
SEE THE FIRST DRAFTS OF MY POEMS  
IN THE INTERESTS OF PSYCHOLOGI-  
CAL RESEARCH INTO THE WORKINGS  
OF THE CREATIVE MIND

So you want to see my papers, look what I have written  
down

'Twixt an ecstasy and heartbreak, con them over with  
a frown.

You would watch my thought's green sprouting ere a  
single blossom's blown.

Would you, friend? And what should I be doing, have  
you thought of that?

Is it pleasant, think you, being gazed upon from feet to  
hat,

Microscopically viewed by eyes commissioned just for  
that?

Don't assure me that your interest does not lie with me  
at all.

I'm a poet to be dissected for the good of science.  
Call

It by any name, I feel like some old root where fungi  
sprawl.

Think you, I could make you see it, all the little  
diverse strands

Locked in one short poem? By no means do I find  
your prying hands

Pleasure bearing and delightful straying round my  
lotus lands.

Not a word but joins itself with some adventure I  
alone

Could attach consideration to. You'd wrench me  
flesh from bone,

Find the heart and count its tappings. At your  
touch, 'twould turn to stone.

What is I, and what that other? That's your quest.

I'll have you know

Telling it would break it from me, it would melt like  
travelled snow.

I will be no weary pathway for another's feet to go.

Seize the butterfly and wing it, thus you learn of but-  
terflies.

But you do not ask permission of the creature, which  
is wise.

If I did consent, to please you, I should tell you packs  
of lies.

To one only will I tell it, do I tell it all day long.

Only one can see the patches I work into quilts of  
song.

Crazy quilts, I'm sure you'd deem them, quite unworthy of your prong.

One must go half-way with poets, feel the thing you're out to find,

Wonder even while you name it, keep it somehow still enshrined,

Still encased within its leafage like an arbour honeyvined.

Lacking just this touch and tremour, how can I but shrink and clutch

What I have to closer keeping. Little limping phantoms, such

Are my poems before I've taught them how to walk without a crutch.

You mean well, I do not doubt it, but you're blind as any mule.



Would you question a mad lover, set his love-making  
to rule?

With your pulse upon his finger, watch him play the  
sighing fool?

Would he win the lady, tell me, with you by? Your  
calculations

Might frustrate a future teeming with immeasurable  
equations.

Which will prove the most important, your research  
or his relations?

Take my answer then, for, flatly, I will not be vivi-  
sected.

Life is more to me than learning. If you clumsily de-  
flected

My contact with what I know not, could it surely be  
connected?

Scarcely could you, knowing nothing, swear to me it  
would be so.

Therefore unequivocally, brazenly, I tell you "No!"  
To the fame of an avowal, I prefer my domino.

Still I have a word, one moment, stop, before you leave  
this room.

Though I shudder thinking of you wandring through  
my beds of bloom,

You may come with spade and shovel when I'm safely  
in the tomb.

ON LOOKING AT A COPY OF ALICE  
MEYNELL'S POEMS, GIVEN ME,  
YEARS AGO, BY A FRIEND

UPON this greying page you wrote  
A whispered greeting, long ago.  
Faint pencil-marks run to and fro  
Scoring the lines I loved to quote.

A sea-shore of white, shoaling sand,  
Blue creeks zigzagging through marsh-grasses,  
Sand pipers, and a wind which passes  
Cloudily silent up the land.

Upon the high edge of the sea  
A great four-master sleeps; three hours  
Her bowsprit has not cleared those flowers.  
I read and look alternately.

It all comes back again, but dim  
As pictures on a winking wall  
Hidden save when the dark clouds fall  
Or crack to show the moon's bright rim.

I well remember what I was,  
And what I wanted. You, unwise  
With sore unwisdom, had no eyes  
For what was patently the cause.

So are we sport of others' blindness,  
We who could see right well alone.  
What were you made of — wood or stone?  
Yet I remember you with kindness.

You gave this book to me to ease  
The smart in me you could not heal.  
Your gift a mirror — woe or weal.

We sat beneath the apple-trees.

And I remember how they rang,  
These words, like bronze cathedral bells  
Down ancient lawns, or citadels  
Thundering with gongs where choirs sang.

Silent the sea, the earth, the sky,  
And in my heart a silent weeping.  
Who has not sown can know no reaping!  
Bitter conclusion and no lie.

O heart that sorrows, heart that bleeds,  
Heart that was never mine, your words  
Were like the pecking Autumn birds  
Stealing away my garnered seeds.

No future where there is no past!  
O cherishing grief which laid me bare,

I wrapped you like a wintry air  
About me. Poor enthusiast!

How strange that tumult, looking back.  
The ink is pale, the letters fade.  
The verses seem to be well made,  
But I have lived the almanac.

And you are dead these drifted years,  
How many I forget. And she  
Who wrote the book, her tragedy  
Long since dried up its scalding tears.

I read of her death yesterday,  
Frail lady whom I never knew  
And knew so well. Would I could strew  
Her grave with pansies, blue and grey.

Would I could stand a little space

Under a blowing, brightening sky,  
And watch the sad leaves fall and lie  
Gently upon that lonely place.

So cried her heart, a feverish thing.  
But clay is still, and clay is cold,  
And I was young, and I am old,  
And in December what birds sing!

Go, wistful book, go back again  
Upon your shelf and gather dust.  
I've seen the glitter through the rust  
Of old, long years, I've known the pain.

I've recollected both of you,  
But I shall recollect no more.  
Between us I must shut the door.  
The living have so much to do.



## WHO HAS NOT, CANNOT HAVE

LANCES slanted against a froward sky,  
So do the days of my life appear before me,  
O verily Beloved.  
Tempt me not, therefore, that I linger  
With my long, pointed, red morocco shoes  
Scuffing the fallen vine-leaves  
A-skip upon the lozenged marbles of your floor.  
I am not a man for chess and blue cushions,  
For sheep's-eyeing across lute-strings  
Of a dapper afternoon.  
What were you among the cooks and water-boys,  
Camping on a wind-vexed plain at nightfall  
Amid the chattering stalks of last year's grasses,  
While I, in some lost distance, wage a war  
Against the goblins of a mouldering generation?  
Would you follow my torn banners where they flicker

In and out of the cloven bellies of mountains,  
And the hail-stones gash like javelins,  
And the sun dries up the roots of hair  
Till my horse is naked as a woman  
Bartered for an arid territory?  
There are such, my lady,  
And I have lands and lances to compel them,  
And owe them nothing but a five-petalled kiss  
Blooming between a brace of bloody battles.

## MID-ADVENTURE

MIST, vapour,  
A little whiff of wind,  
Noticed as nothing and as soon forgotten,  
Such was my purpose.  
It would have held, too,  
No doubt of that,  
And you and I no other than we were.  
You would not have it so.  
Your call cloaked me in the seeming of reality,  
I entered, bidden, to your consciousness.  
And here I stand,  
Waiting, for so you will for me,  
Waiting.  
For what?  
Would you have me like a caryatid,  
Holding above your head some sheltering sky

Of softened, tempered sunlight?

Would you keep me as a gathered curio

To say: "See, this I found, and kept for luck"?

Or do you guess at possibilities,

A warmth to draw from me when nights grow cold

And gales whine bitterly in window cracks?

For myself,

I have lost recollection how I came.

Returning shows a dim, uneasy way

My feet refuse to follow.

Yet suppose,

Suppose the very custom of my long

Vacant delaying just inside the door

Blurs me to an impassive bibelot,

A bit of furniture which, neither used

Nor looked at, is most likely to be left

Totally unregarded and ignored —

My summons nothing,

A caprice outworn —

Standing forsaken in an empty room.

How the wind howls!

The fire is a red recumbent ash.

The future, strange chameleon to the drift of time,

Turns round on me a grinning pasteboard face

Dropped from a masker at a carnival.

Hola! then. I'll be harlequin and dance

In checkers of blood-red and black hearse plumes,

Capering, dead drunk, upon a coffin lid.

## CORRESPONDENCE

I wrote her a letter, she wrote me three,  
And the cadence was that of a leafing tree.

I wrote her four letters, she wrote me none,  
And the scuffled leaves lay dim and dun.

I broke my pen and wrote no more,  
Lacking the postman's knock at the door.

I scored that year with a mark of chalk:  
Second-hand compliments, windy talk,

Pleasant platitudes hung on a nail  
Useful to plump an uneven sale.

It will all come out in the wash, they say,  
And to-morrow but duplicates yesterday.

Even great Pharaoh takes no more room  
Than his huddled bones, though the spacious gloom

Containing them goes by his stately name.  
Dead leaves, dead kings, it is much the same.

Cocks crow daily on hills of dung,  
And no song is the first, nor the last, that's sung.



TO A LADY OF UNDENIABLE  
BEAUTY AND PRACTISED CHARM

No peacock strutting on a balustrade  
Could air his feathers with a cooler grace,  
Assume a finer insolence of pace,  
Or make his sole advance a cavalcade  
Of sudden shifts of colour, slants of shade,  
Than you, the cold indifference of your face  
Sharpening the cunning lure of velvets, lace,  
Greens, blues, and golds, seduction on parade.  
You take the accolade of staring eyes  
As something due your elegance of pose,  
Feeding your vanity on pecks of dust,  
The weary iteration which supplies  
No zest. I see you as a cankered rose  
Its silver petals curled and cracked with rust.

## AND SO, I THINK, DIOGENES

I TOLD them to look at an apple-tree  
In a gust of blossom. They could not see.

I told them to notice people's faces  
In quiet, unexpected places;

To catch the flying speech of eyes,  
And stumble on some young surprise

Of joy as sharp as any dawn  
Or afternoon across a lawn.

I told them to look at a thin, white steeple  
Soaring above a throng of people,

And listen to the people's cheers  
When some one spoke. They had no ears.

Instead, they led me to a hill  
Above a bay. The noon was still.

The water in the bay was cold;  
The hanging air was slack with mould.

Gravestones were scattered through the grass  
So close there was no room to pass

For any save the narrow dead  
Who need no paths on which to tread.

Each scraggy gravestone bore a name  
And some brief episode of fame,

Some pious irony of grief,  
Draped in the tatters of belief.

Misshapen flowers stood awry,  
Too weak to face the staring sky.

The wind upon that barren hill  
Was strangely sleek and strangely still.

A dreary shadow crept and crept  
Across the gaunt graves where they slept

Who died so many years ago  
And lay here softly, row on row,  
With nowhere else at all to go.

\* \* \* \* \*

They led me up and down the hill.  
They said no word. The dusk was chill.

They left me at the edge of town;  
They gazed at me and up and down.

Their eyes were ghastly white and cool  
Like fishes in a frozen pool.

They left me where I stood, a        at  
With feverish ague, turned an        ent

Back to the hill. "But they are dead,  
They do but wander home," I said.

## MESDAMES ATROPOS AND CLIO ENGAGE IN A GAME OF SLAP-STICK

*"And better there for her than at that inn he left her at to pine  
and watch the Royal Sovereign come swing come smirk in sailor  
blue and star and meet the rain."*

*"THE AMAZING MARRIAGE."*

COME swing, come smirk, in sailor blue and star,  
And I, poor lad, dead as Balaam's donkey,  
Nothing left but a coat and star  
And anyone's face clapped on top of 'em.  
I was a round chuck-penny for fortune, I was,  
A fellow to straddle a quarter deck, step up step down,  
Guns, and runs, and the wind's eye winking.  
So I stood it, swallowing the harbour jauntings  
Like so many puffs of cream,  
And off to windward, clip at a black squall  
With a snap of my fingers.  
Now I'm the laughing-stock of a cat's-paw;  
Come swing, come smirk, to every little sniff of air,

Sailor blue and star, up and down,  
With my hinges squealing like a cracked serpent,  
And every window behind mocking the sight of me  
And my silly star, gone no one knows whither.  
I was a man to stand the slash of hurricanes,  
With a bowsprit of good metal spitting mouthfuls of  
water and liking it.

Come swing, come smirk now,  
With the black rain snivelling down my front,  
And the apple-faced sun wizening me to a cranberry. •  
Come swing, come smirk, all day long,  
Watching a boy jabbing a goose-quill into paper,  
By candle-light, when the moon fails,  
And Zip! they go out of window like so many fire-  
balloons,  
And some take the trees, and some foul the mud,  
And some give me a pinch in passing.  
Once I had a belly-ful of good sea-salt in me,  
And a cocked hat of brine to brisk me up,

Me and my star;

Now I eat that fellow's ripped-up papers,

Whenever there's a breeze.

And the sight of him, red-haired ninny,

Sitting there with his head like a bonfire,

And his heart too, I daresay,

Is a bitterer thing to spy at than the march of a China

Seas typhoon.

Come swing, come smirk, in sailor blue and star,

To catch the rain, and catch his papers,

Hot to blister the paint off me,

And the white rain spoiling 'em,

And the blue, morning rain sticking 'em together,

And I in the drift creaking my rust at the flight they

make.

Faugh! I say,

This is a pretty heaven, this is!

Dead and gone and should be let lie,



Not swinging and smirking after other men's scrib-  
blings.

Sailor blue and star,

To tell the world here's an inn to stop at,

And a young fellow blazing his eyes blind in a worm-  
hole

After something he can't see.

Pretty world he's made for me to swing in,

Smirking at him with my star that's only paint

When the bells toll of a Sunday,

And a grinning churchyard underneath

Rots the man I was.

Can he cheat it when his time's come,

Or will he, too, be strung up on a pair of whining  
hinges,

Sailor blue and star, or something like it?

Ding-dong bell on a sign-board,

And the old goose gobbled full of papers

Waddling down to the ditch.

That's a song for a Sunday morning,  
Come swing, come smirk, till your boards give way,  
And you go to grind shoe-leather,  
And the wind can't peck you from the dust.  
Grand world, come swing, come smirk,  
Baby Bunting world of painted nonsense,  
Up and down to a scrape of rusty bearings  
Like a man with a cold at the back of his nose;  
Holy-ghost world with a star on it like a cold pancake,  
And the devil's beer brewed of sick brains  
Which should be let lie and aren't,  
And go for the choking of geese  
Laid out stark in a green ditch  
Of a Sunday morning for the church-folk to see.

## A COMMUNICATION

You deceived me handsomely  
With your inconsolable grief at parting.  
I really believed in your crocodile tears  
And suffered at the exhibition of your suffering;  
A little for myself also at the breaking of an old tie,  
A habit grown as comfortably pleasant  
As the wearing of a friendly dressing-gown.  
For we had passed the stage of exhilaration  
And reached the solace of a quiet domesticity.  
I was prepared to linger over it in retrospect,  
Not too unhappily, for had we not agreed a thousand  
times  
That this sundering was merely geographical.  
And now a month has passed and not a word have  
I had from you,  
Not so much as a scrawl to say you could not write!

Fate lays innumerable springes for persons of imagination.

Because I wished to believe,  
I saw in your Byronic gesture of woe,  
Not what it purported to be, certainly,  
But something not too different.  
You cast a larger shadow than yourself, that I realized,  
But even I, who should have known better,  
Believed it was your shadow.  
I crave your pardon for my blunder.  
The mask was well assumed,  
I should have been critical enough to understand it  
was an artistic production.  
I congratulate you on the verisimilitude of it,  
But I shall not be fooled again, be sure of that.  
In future I shall see you as you are:  
A plaster figure of a man that's grown a little dusty.

We all have knick-knacks round which once meant  
something.

It is rather a wrench to take them from their niches,  
But life goes on, imperious, and bric-à-brac accumu-  
lates.

Still, because I cherished you once, I will not throw  
you away just yet.

I will put you on an upper shelf in the pantry of my  
mind,

Among old flower-vases I no longer use, being of a  
bygone fashion.

It may interest you to know that the place you oc-  
cupied

Looks a little strange to me without you,

But that, of course, will pass.

## THE IMMORTALS

I HAVE read you, and read you, my Betters,  
Piling high on the clear brown shelves,  
Mountain high, your very selves  
Disguised in a garb of letters.

I have poked and pried beyond,  
Seeking past words for how you did it,  
While my mind was one tormented fidget  
Like a stone-struck, shallow pond.

I have ravelled your patterns out,  
And matched them piece by piece as they were,  
Till your hearts flashed again from the erstwhile blur.  
Did I know then the rule from the rout?

Do I know how a flower comes —  
A spurt of blue or a shoot of rose?

Plant a seed and watch while it grows.

Chrysanthemums — geraniums —

Let the scientists crack their craniums!

I know what paper is,

And I've handled pencils, and pens, and ink.

Does grammar teach us the way men think?

Can you narrow a man to a synthesis?

Build him from his parts if you can.

Shade him to colour and cut him to shape,

Docket his method, something will escape,

And, presto! Where is the man?

Two and two make four.

If your two and two will amalgamate,

But who knows the way to add moonshine to paint.

And there we touch the core.

I read you as I look at the sky,  
Gratefully wondering at its fresh-flowing blue.  
If I'm not, why I'm not, so why this to-do —  
Must I disqualify?

Well, I won't, my Masters, so reckon  
On the valiant rivalry of a flea.  
I should lie to you if I never said "We."  
You great gods, why do you beckon?

Clearly the fault is yours,  
Flaunting a challenge I can't resist.  
I declare my back has a permanent twist,  
And my boot-straps are counted by scores.

Out of your anguish we see,  
Out of your mighty rejoicing we are.  
Your burning has seared us with a bleeding scar,  
We strive in irony.



You most Serene and Dead  
In your bright gardens! Our Gethsemane  
Is planted with your immortality.  
We walk with feet of lead.

With leaden feet we move,  
And still with heads flung up and bared.  
Fools, in that seeing, yet we dared  
To follow you and prove.

Prove whether stars or ashes.  
That's the touchstone, is it not?  
Graven tablets or dry-rot.  
Well, the mist has sunny flashes.

## APOTHEOSIS

THE mountains were both far and high,  
Their jagged peaks along the sky  
Broke it like splintered porphyry.

I stood beneath a cherry-tree  
Whose thick leaves fluttered ceaselessly,  
And there were cherry clusters — three.

Prone at my feet was one who slept;  
At my right hand, a maid who wept;  
And at my left, a youth who kept

Vigil before a naked sword  
Which gleamed and sparkled on the sward  
As though it were a holy word.

An eery moonlight lit the place,  
Just bright enough to show each face  
And each lithe body's proper grace.

The weeping maiden raised her head:  
"I die for want of food," she said,  
And in her famished gaze I read

The wasting of her life in tears.  
Her face was shattered as though years  
Had nicked it with an iron shears.

"Peace, Mournful Lady," I replied,  
"Within these leaves dark cherries hide."  
I raised my hand, but in a stride,

Catching his sword up, so he came,  
The youth. His helmet burst to flame,  
And on it shone a fearful name.

The maiden moaned and sank beneath  
The tree's foot, like a fallen wreath  
Of myrtle-buds, stripped of their sheath.

Once more we were as we had been:  
One wept, one slept, one watched his keen  
Sword lying in the grasses green.

Then she who slumbered stirred and woke,  
And throwing back her ample cloak  
She lifted heavy eyes and spoke:

"I faint for hunger," whispered she,  
"And though above me I can see  
Cherries, I am spent utterly.

Reach me the fruit for kindness, so  
My blood may once more course and flow

As it was used, oh, long ago."

The words were faint as is the jar  
Of air behind a falling star  
Felt in a forest where ghosts are.

"Be still," I answered, "if I fail  
To succour you, no burning mail  
Will be the force to which I quail."

Brave words to whip my spirit on.  
Under the leaves the cherries shone.  
A moment and I should have done.

But, as the thought came, so did he,  
And stood beside the cherry-tree,  
And struck his sword upon her knee.

Even while she fell, he went his way,

And laid his sword as erst it lay,  
And mournfully awaited day.

Then, drearily, above the rim  
Of mountains, rose a sun so dim  
I only knew day watching him.

For, as the morning slowly grew,  
He took another ghastly hue,  
And what was pale had turned to blue.

His corselet was corroded rust,  
Between his greaves a briar thrust  
Its long head up, his eyes were dust.

His sword still lay upon the ground,  
But all at once it moved and wound  
Among the grass-blades to a mound

Of heaped-up earth, and entered in,  
Inch after inch, for what had been  
A sword was now become a thin

Long line of ants, who crawled and went  
With the strange, multiple consent  
Of myriads working one intent.

Sick and distraught, I turned to where  
The weeping maid had been, and there  
Was nothing but a gusty air

Which blew upon a ruined town.  
Tall girders, stripped of stone, looked down  
On crumbled streets where weeds had grown.

A doorway opened a gaunt eye  
Upon the rats which scurried by.  
A roofless window watched the sky.

And all the frayed and brittle soil  
Of that dead city seemed to boil  
With insects laden down with spoil.

Again I turned and sought the spot  
Where one had slumbered, and my hot  
Eyes rested on a graveyard plot.

A devastating plague of sand  
Had swept it, piled on either hand  
Were broken headstones, and a band

Of plundering ants crept in and out  
Among the graves and round about.  
The very air smarted with drought.

The valley burned without a sun,  
Gasping beneath a twilight, dun



And twitched with heat, through which gnats spun.

And, sweeping it, my eyes could see

No semblance of a cherry-tree,

The plain was flat as plain could be.

But where that long night I had stood

Lay a sarcophagus of wood

Covered with ants as red as blood.

Then suddenly a frozen cry

Tingled along the brazen sky,

And he who uttered it was I.

Tangled in scorching sand I fled.

The mountains closed about my head.

The stifled air proclaimed me dead.

I woke — for I had slept, it seemed.

My head ached and I must have dreamed.

Above me, cherry blossoms gleamed

A slant of whiteness to a sky

So blue it glared bewilderingly.

I crushed an ant and wondered why.

## BEHIND TIME

ON days when the sky is grey, not blue,  
My mind strays back for an age or two,  
And amuses itself in a little place  
I have made to provide a breathing space  
Whenever our twentieth-century air  
Heats to a temperature so rare  
It stifles fancy, and our thundering cities,  
Weighted down by cares and pities,  
Load my soul with a heap of dust  
Through which no least conceit may thrust  
A single stalk or a single bloom  
In a free-flung way. Keats made a room  
To house him on afternoons like this;  
Poe followed him, and created a bliss  
Of black and silver furniture;  
And Samain, obedient to the lure

Of both these chambers, builded his  
Like as a peâ, a sort of *bis*  
To the others. But Browning broke new ground  
In Italy, and what he found  
Was "a gash in a wind-grieved Apennine"  
With a castle a-top. Now this of mine  
Is no rock-perched castle, not even a pink  
House of scaling stucco just at the brink  
Of a blue Neapolitan bay. Browning's love  
Outsoars mine as he soars above  
Whatever little there is in me,  
I am more modest, as you will see.  
My dream is a cottage, trim and neat  
As paint can make it, the village street  
Runs past, beyond a grove of trees,  
But only my gable-ends show through these  
To any one walking up and down  
The sleepy street of that sea-side town  
Where even the fishermen merely fish

When someone's table's in need of a dish  
Of oysters, or eels, or cod. My eaves  
Peep archly over the bustling leaves  
Of Virginia creeper, and down below  
The wall-beds glitter with golden glow,  
And asters, and black-eyed sun-flowers,  
And a strawberry-bush with its dun flowers  
That smell of allspice stands at each end  
Just where the lawn takes a sudden bend  
And turns the corner. A foot or two  
From the creaking piazza, a naval review  
Of seventy-eights and ninety-fours  
Whirls round on a wheel without a pause:  
Four-masted schooners luff and jibe,  
Fill again with wind, and circumscribe  
The limit of their revolution,  
And in the centre, the "Constitution"  
Points always at the very eye  
Of whatever wind is blowing by.

Beyond the lawn, a little cliff  
Drops to the shore, held firm and stiff  
By rooted broom. The chuckling lap  
Of waves on shingle, the sudden flap  
Of a fisherman's sail as he hoists it up,  
A grumbling rowlock — you may sup  
On a sunset silence such as this  
Each afternoon. The clematis . . .  
Drops a petal on the old sea wall . . .  
As purple as the lights which crawl  
And melt and flow across the bay,  
Whipped green and silver with streaks of grey  
Differently mingled every day.  
Along the tall horizon slips  
A dim procession of sailing ships  
So slowly that they scarcely change  
Positions from morning till night. The range  
Of the telescope planted on the green  
Brings illusions of sound where no sound has been,

The bustle of shipboard suddenly grown  
Near and clear through the glass half-crown  
Of the eye-piece, but take away your eye,  
The ships are still as tapestry.  
Here is a foot-path, let us go  
And see the place where my flowers grow.  
Sunken a foot or two below  
The bowling-green, my garden lies,  
Flanked by hemlocks of every size  
Clipped into peacocks and unicorns,  
And monstrous dragons for the scorns  
Of noble St. Georges. A hedge of thorns  
Protects the tiger-lilies set  
In rigid rows. The mignonette  
Smells sweet, I see a bunch of it  
Plucked by a hand which wears a mit,  
Just as I see the pansy faces  
Peeking from kerchiefs of Mechlin laces,  
And note the trace of rowelled spurs

In the monk's-hood bed where a late bee stirs.  
Here is a maid and a manikin  
Of painted bisque, half-hidden in  
An old laburnum's drooping shade.  
The little man rests on his spade  
And ogles the maiden's broad-brimmed hat  
Since he can see nothing of her but that.  
Paul and Virginia, he and she,  
Mincingly fashioned in pottery.  
Now up three steps where the sunlight sifts  
Through a thick pleached alley, when one lifts  
The latch of the gate, the click as it closes  
Is like the snap of buds into roses.  
See the little apples are taking shape  
And colour above our heads, they gape  
And gossip between the latticed leaves.  
Look down at your feet where the sunlight weaves  
Quaint patterns of stems and fruit and we  
Walk round in them deliciously.



Now let us go through my open door  
And tread the black-and-white-squared floor  
And hang our hats on the horns of a deer  
I've put in the corner over here.  
Four rooms as uneven as carpenter's rule  
Ever dared to leave. The first is full  
From floor to ceiling of maps and books;  
Poetry mostly, by the looks.  
Thick little duodecimos,  
Slender cloth-covered octavos,  
Musty, and fusty, and fingered all,  
Make a faded rainbow of each wall.  
Within them, faint as a scent of musk  
Are words which glimmer through the dusk  
Of that vanished world which lies just over  
The hither side of each marbled cover.  
The fireplace is low and wide  
With a rusty crane against the side  
And an oven behind, where I keep my cherry

Brandy. Mahogany, pale as sherry,  
My writing-table is; the locks  
Are brass in the form of crested cocks.  
Here are chairs of red and brown  
Crumbling leather, pliant as down;  
On the arms is manifest  
The very spot where my elbows rest  
When I balance my mighty folios  
And read of men with timber-toes  
Who discovered archipelagoes  
Or rotted for weeks in a bear-skin tent  
With moss for their sole nourishment  
Beneath Auroran boreal  
Nights for phantasmagorial  
Possession of a goodish slice  
Of that part of the earth which is nothing but ice.  
Now cross the hall and I'll introduce  
You to something else; a ship's caboose  
Saved from the wreck of the Minnie B.

Gone on the sands in seventy-three.  
Here is a lantern which used to scan  
The foaming wake of an Indiaman;  
These chessmen were scrimshawed out of the teeth  
Of a whale; that knife in its lacquer sheath  
Was filched from the deck of a Chinese junk  
A half-an-hour before she sunk  
With her pirate crew; this necklace of shells  
Was strung for the Indian Jezebels  
Of Pitcairn Island, who smiled long years  
Ago at the "Bounty" mutineers.  
The floor of this room seems to careen  
Beneath one's feet, and walls of green  
Sea-water to dash against the slim  
Matched boards of the sides. I hear the swim  
Of a deck-wash sliding from scupper to scupper,  
And down through the flanges of the upper  
Air, faintly flying above the swell,  
The everlasting cry: "All's well!"

Or "There she blows!" or "Breakers ahead!"

I wonder if anything's really dead.

Well, well, there's enough of that. In here

Is a totally different atmosphere.

A pretty shape, this room, the leather

Hangings keep out all notion of weather,

They are Spanish, embossed in gold and blue.

That little picture is a view

Of Venice by Guardi, the Piazzetta

In Carnival, a floweret, a

Shimmer, a perfume, an age in petto

Eighteenth century allegretto.

Considerably unlike it hangs

A Turner, where a mountain's fangs

Close over the plunge of a waterfall

With a slant of sunlight striking it all

To the doom of a planet's evenfall.

Jagged, haggard, splintered steep,

Swept with gold above the deep

Abysmal hollow curving under  
The bow of the torrent, grim rotunda  
Tawny lit and shocked with thunder.  
Here's a picture of nothing but the tops of trees,  
Wind-blown, cloud overlooked. If you please  
'Tis the life-like portrait of a breeze,  
No more, no less, what Constable saw  
On Hampstead Heath when a brisk cat's-paw  
Flurried out of the West-North-West the prize  
Of an Autumn morning. I see your eyes  
Stray to the corner where stands my spinet.  
Suppose we consider it a minute,  
Salvator Rosa painted the case  
Of satin-wood. Is it out of place  
To put a drawing by William Blake  
Just above? Does it seem to shake  
A symmetry? Perhaps, but it's done.  
Observe the rolling, crimson sun  
Glitter along the huge outline

Of that weary form, relaxed, supine,  
A man on the edge of a rocky world  
Balanced above an ocean curled  
And frozen. All Eternity  
Shouts in that over-borne man for me.  
Let us sit awhile and hark to the speech  
Of a century beyond our reach,  
Colossal, fastidious, witty, brave,  
Importuning us from the grave.  
Shift on your spindle-legged gold-white chair,  
You will not find the answer where  
You seek it. Science cannot raise the flap  
Between us and these, nor know what gap  
Divides Reynolds's, Romney's, Gainsborough's  
Population from men like us.  
There seems the fragilest sort of partition  
Between then and now. By what condition  
Do we subscribe to a cruel decree  
That what is, for us, is but what we see?

The world shrinks daily; must we confine  
Ourselves to a geographer's line,  
Choosing our friends by accident  
Of almanac? What impertinent  
Design is this, which would control  
Free intercourse of soul with soul,  
Because, forsooth, an airy thing  
Brushes us with its bat-like wing,  
A thing we cannot see or touch!  
Shall such a nothing dare a clutch  
At us in passing? So I sit  
Considering time and hating it,  
Until I glance at that strange clock  
Upon the mantel. With a shock,  
I see the face is changed, the numbers  
Are there no more, something else encumbers  
The dial, a half-moon something, writ  
About the upper edge of it.  
I notice that the iron hands

Point to this crescent, and each stands  
Stock still; then I behold the words,  
Contrived grotesquely of crossing swords,  
And what I read in crimson ink  
Is, "It is later than you think!"  
I rise and take my latch-key down  
And through the peaceful, sleeping town  
I walk back to my century,  
The dun, dumb years reserved for me  
To wander in and call them mine  
And be called theirs in every line  
Historians may choose to write  
Upon my night, my night, my night.



# GOUACHE PICTURES OF ITALY



## PALAZZO CONTARINI

BESIDE the high window, but partly withdrawn  
And concealed by the fold of a gold-lacquered screen,  
This admirable day-bed discovers the sheen  
Of its hooped salmon satin and yellowing lawn.

On spindle legs, thin as a spider's, it stands.  
The gilding has scaled to a faint silver tone.  
A lavender dust, as of hours outgrown,  
Drifts past on a quaver of old sarabands.

Bewilderingly fragile, it baffles decay  
With the porcelain pinks on the ormolu spray  
Twined about the Saxe clock. Hark! the weary sweet  
chime

Of the hour it strikes. At precisely this minute  
The Duke would declare he was wasting his time,

And the lady half-languidly rise from her spinet.

Poor flesh and blood lovers long dead, the fine bloom  
Of your coquetry crumbles and smiles in this room.

## THE LIME AVENUE

WITH a crunching of gravel and flapping upon it  
Of scarlet soutanes, down an alley of limes,  
Where the tree-boles, as evenly distanced as rhymes, \\  
Cut their long promenade into bars like a sonnet,

Two cardinals whispering under the trees,  
Discussing the doctor's last news of the Pope,  
And artfully hiding an indiscreet hope  
With a long pinch of snuff and its consequent sneeze.

Lowsy eyes, pendant jowls, immense purple-sashed  
waist,

Soft labial words dripping out on the taste  
Of a greedy ambition. The other — succinct,

Lips of wire, and face all one cold, chiselled piece,  
Pronouncing his bribe with each word quite distinct:

“To your connoisseur’s palate I offer my niece.”

Pope’s arms in a moss-confused lozenge, an ache  
Of slow wind, and the whine of a gardener’s rake.

## THE WATER STAIR

UNDER cypresses, ilexes, myrtles, within  
Granite edges, or slipped over broad-ended stairs,  
Is a moving of water, and large tranquil squares  
Stain its umber and gold with a green lily skin.

No splash, just a ripple which jars the smooth air  
Into damp undulations. Remote and suspended  
Winds pause in the trees, and the shadows are blended  
With gleams as of moonlight entangling drowned hair.

Steps — steps — phantom footsteps. They shuffle  
and blur

And crowd the wide stairs with an odd, timid stir  
Thinly teasing the sense where there's nothing to hear.

Crimson heels, silver clocks, the shock of them whines  
With the shrillness of flutes in the thick atmosphere.

Purple flutes fading silver and rose through the pines.

Liquid lap of old water, and I am confused

With the scent of crushed violets my feet have  
bruised.



## THE STABLE

Two rows of stiff poplars, wind-bitten and grey, \\  
Flank the high-cobbled courtyard in long, serried lines;  
And between them the old stable-clock dimly shines  
With its cracked yellow dial defying decay.

It was here that six lumbering, thick-barreled mares  
Were wont to be harnessed to my Lord's glass coach  
When he drove out to call on his neighbours and  
broach  
Some scheme of importance to landed affairs.

Now the leaves of the poplars may settle and fall  
And drift where they will in the juts of the wall,  
While the grass has half-buried the sharp-pointed  
stones.

A ripple of pigeons waves over the yard,  
And a toothless old bitch, who is nothing but bones,  
Growls drowsily at them to prove she's on guard.

With a wheeze, and a whirr, and a horrible catch,  
The clock strikes eighteen; it is two by my watch.

## FÊTE AT CASERTA

## THE QUEEN OF NAPLES RECEIVES

BUT tickets, of course, at the door of the theatre  
Scrutinized by a Lord of the Court. What a blaze  
Of wax candles reflected in gilding, a haze  
Of cross-lights like a halo! Is this not Caserta?

The pit is a ball-room, the stage a bright stair  
Of musicians in livery; the dazzle becomes  
An effulgent wax sun where the great kettle-drums  
Crown the apex. Can eyesight endure such a glare?

The Queen! Hist! The Queen! Though she's wearing  
a mask,

No one can mistake her. She approaches to ask  
If the strangers liked France, if they'd met the Dau-  
phine?

At midnight exactly, proclaimed by six flutes,  
Enter soldiers with plates and a great galantine  
Of hot macaroni, with cream and iced fruits.

But the Queen sups on two dishes only, and these  
Are prepared by her own special cooks — Viennese.

## SANTA SETTIMANA

ON a carpeted bench, thirteen well-chosen priests,  
All tutored and drilled in an excellent miming.  
The Last Supper staged to the sonorous chiming  
Of the Pope's special choir in silks and batistes.

His Holiness, bibbed with an apron of lace,  
Arises sedately from his great purple chair  
And draws off thirteen socks leaving thirteen feet bare,  
Washes each in a basin of gold, and with grace

Presents thirteen bouquets, and a paper of coins,  
Returns to his carved purple chair, bows, and joins  
His well-mannered hands in a semblance of prayer.

Thirteen silver plates laid on exquisite lawn,  
Thirteen eager priests' noses snuffing the fare:

Herring salad, broccoli in oil. And each pawn

Gulps the wine the Pope pours. While behind, the  
Pope's guards,

In a stiff inattention, plan their next game of cards.

## THE AMBASSADOR

COAT of purple stamped velvet, satin breeches to  
match

Of the same sober, elegant hue, white silk stockings  
Of a texture so fine that their silver-thread clockings  
Seem embroidered on nothing. A great gold-sealed  
watch.

The slightly bull neck is concealed by the fall  
Of a cascade of point-lace imported from Brussels,  
And ruffles of lace at the sleeve-ends hide muscles  
Too thick for a man who would shine at a ball.

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur aims at all things, it seems:  
Wit, duellist, banker, his lottery schemes  
Are the whisper of Paris. He glitters to-day

Sardinia's envoy to France, whose finesse  
Has taught him the power there is in display;  
Note the painstaking fanfaronade of his dress.

That coat was embroidered in China! His air  
Is a trifle bombastic as he walks up the stair.



## FROM NICE TO ONEGLIA

AN astonishing view, she regards it with eyes  
All astare at its glitter and space. Where the sea,  
Creeping up to the cliffs, leaves a foot or two free,  
Runs the path she is following with such gay surprise.

A lady, a Countess, whose long flowing habit  
Proclaims her as English by every known rule,  
Perched up on a deft little mouse-coloured mule  
Stepping daintily, softly, as any jack-rabbit.

What a heavenly journey, this coming by land  
From Nice to Oneglia, outriding her train!  
She is vastly amused — why, even the sand . . .

The mule shies, she pulls him up sharply and sees,  
Just over the edge of her tightly held rein,

A skull, water-washed, grimly bright in the breeze.

The guide, coming up, shrugs his shoulders with shady  
Indifference, "It's only the pirates, my Lady."

## VILLA CAPOUANA

IN the grounds of the Villa Capouana where now,  
By municipal order, is a vast cemetery,  
The noble and good rest in row after row,  
But a single great grave, far more spacious and airy,  
  
Is allotted to those so unwise as to die  
Or be killed out of spite in the late revolution.  
Here they lie in a heap underneath the blue sky,  
A heap of white bones in a mixed distribution.

What excellent playthings! Giannina has wound  
A thigh-bone in bright purple rags. "This," says she,  
"Is Brighella." And Tito, having pulled from the  
mound

A great hollow skull, gathers violets and yew

To put round its head. "See, a King, now he's  
crowned,

And the King asks Brighella to a monster review."

So the children set arms, fingers, jaws, in platoon,  
And play soldiers and kings all the long afternoon.

## THE CHURCH OF SANTA CHIARA, NAPLES

THE day has arrived when the marvellous earth  
Beneath Santa Chiara has leave to exhibit  
The dead it preserves in the stature and girth  
They displayed when alive, which most earths prohibit.

Since even such dead cannot stand, they are held  
By a rope round the waist concealed by their dress.  
To be sure they loll oddly, as though they rebelled  
At this forced resurrection in its full loathliness.

But the populace, come by the dozens to see  
Its neighbours and friends, comments in high glee:  
“Look at Niccolò Baldi, how rakish he looks.

That's because Margherita hangs her head right beside him.

She is teasing him still, though they're nothing but spooks."

"She's a fright now, at least. I could never abide him."

"Nor he you, I believe." They titter and leer.

Too bad such a show comes but one day a year.

## IN THE CAMPAGNA

WITH his wide crimson cloak and his cardinal's hat,  
Like an emphasized flower, amazing the grass  
Of the Autumn Campagna, he stands with his fat  
Fingers quick on the lock of his gun and the glass

Which is tied to an owl on a perch glints and glitters  
Attracting the larks and the finches that fly  
In a dazzling confusion of wings and sharp twitters.  
The cloud of them hides several yards of blue sky.

Behind him, two liveried grooms load fresh guns  
And watch larks and goldfinches fall in dozens,  
    quenched suns  
Attesting his skill, for the Cardinal's game

Is how many small song-birds he can take as his booty

Without shooting the owl who is flustered though  
tame.

A rare sportsman this Cardinal in his moments off  
duty!

To-night at the Contessa's supper he'll boast  
That she owes to his prowess the larks served on toast. .



**PORTRAITS, PLACES, AND  
PEOPLE**



## TO ELEONORA DUSE

## IN ANSWER TO A LETTER

“REGRETS and memories these short December days.”

How the words cut and scar themselves

Across my heart!

Dear lady of the great compassion,

All tenderness enmeshed in withes of truth,

Experience harboured for its seeking flame,

Clean burning flame of knowledge beyond thought,

Sword-blade of sheerest beauty,

As the sun sinks wanly,

Branch by branch,

Through the shaking, leafless trees,

How cruelly the twilight comes —

I watch it here,

At this long distance from you,

And rage at impotence

Which can give you no brighter present  
Than the flicker of a small red candle  
Lit by you long ago.  
You wrong yourself dwelling upon the past;  
I have it from your lips:  
“The past is dead. The future alone has life.”  
The past is dead, save in the continuity  
Of your most inaccessible loveliness.  
Where touch is healing should be no regret  
At that which makes it so.  
You walked, and walk, incarnate soul  
Of human needs and meetings.  
The sight of you is the clarity of courage;  
Your movements, insistent, compelling, muted  
trumpets in a still air;  
Your voice, ah, dear, that voice, as April rain  
Dropping at evening on beds of unsprung tulips.  
Where has there ever been a flesh  
So rightly framing such a spirit? Tell me.

You cannot.

Words are pebbles,

A gravel-path for you to tread and spurn.

Music is liker to encase your essence,

Yet you escape, for what you really are

Hangs to no swiftest flash of evocation,

But floats in rondure of its perfectness

Out of our sight as possible, impossible,

Peak of a human capability,

Infinite spirit with the lightest shadowing

Of merciful and finite flesh.

Has any one ever so held the cords of life,

Of all our lives, as you?

You dare not say there has and gaze truth in the eye.

Look back, then, if you must,

But see plain fact,

Yourself the soul's wine of a generation,

The whispered bourne of blessings to a world.

## TO ELEONORA DUSE

1923

IF you believed my words,  
O tragic, incommunicable lady,  
Would they lure you for an instant  
From your long, rapt contemplation  
Of the sunset-tinted clouds  
Lowering in grim and huddled splendour  
Over the broken turrets of your ruined sorrows?  
Dead to the sting of anguish,  
The misery that you ache no more  
Is aching so preponderant and huge  
You walk within it as an atmosphere  
And breathe its bitterness like some gaunt poison  
Easing you into numbness  
Even of its slow insidious advance.  
Where grief has watched

Sits now the ghost of grief.  
Where tenderness once held out arms to gather  
A universe's loneliness,  
Reigns now a weariness of feeling,  
A kindliness too spent to give itself,  
To smile less calmly than a sculptured saint  
Enduring anthems in an incensed niche.  
The small dried cones of my fardel of years  
Make a poor faggot to light before you,  
And yet if you believed them wood not wax  
Might not the little raw flame of them  
Warm you to a single throb of your lost life?  
I see you there before me,  
Distant as the shattered past, the shapeless future.  
The sprig of your sowing withers in my hands,  
Your remoteness is too vast to cherish it.  
See, I place it where your somnambulistic feet  
May tread upon it  
Crushing its fragrance to play round your dreams

I could give much,  
Give back what you will not believe your own,  
Give laughter, tears.  
I am not poor in such,  
Richer than you are now, perhaps.  
You put me by  
Gently, as something in your path  
Which, scarcely seeing, yet you brush aside.  
You hurt less in the days of your revolt  
Than in this quietude of charity.  
The sight of you is piercing as a cry,  
Your loveliness betrays my eyes to tears,  
They smart in falling.  
I am no hero-worshipper,  
Yet for your sake I long to babble prayers  
And overdo myself in services.  
Is this not love, then?  
May I not write myself disciple, follower?  
Unworthy, doubtless, but authentic grain



Sprung from your scattered seed?

Yet you smile and say:

“Of course, it is not true.”

If this be not truth,

Then truth and I have never made a company.

You want no service, no compassion, no refreshment.

Tranquillity you think you have, or call it so,

I call it poison dripped from traitorous urns.

You pass me like a legend sprayed with flowers,

The legend of my youth, and now henceforward

Of my age.

Pass, lady,

To whom I can give nothing, nothing.

Yet here again I say it,

With the doggedness of custom grown inveterate:

What you gave I give back again and shall,

Along the smooth years where you wander now,

Perfectly heedless of your heedlessness.

Truth is a brazen thing, and I,

Banging against the brass of utter fact,  
Do make perhaps a horrid din  
To your peace-longing ears.  
So be it, I am silent,  
But still here, believed or not,  
A chance creation not at all desired,  
Yet so existing while our double names  
Shall carry any meaning to men's minds.

## THE MADONNA OF CARTHAGENA

WHERE a chain of sandy beaches  
Cuts across an open sea,  
Blue as asters, pink as peaches  
Out beyond the farthest reaches  
For a distant eye to see,  
Every colour that one wishes  
May be witnessed hereabout  
From the sand-dunes to the ocean.  
If the tide is going out,  
There are sea-gulls in commotion  
Flying over where a fish is;  
In a pool as green as grass  
Crimson shatterings may pass  
Or a blackness blowing over  
Quench the colour like a cover;  
And the fronds of water-weeds,

Thick as leather, wave and feather,  
Tossing stems blown out with beads  
As wave after wave recedes.  
If the tide is coming in,  
What a thunder! What a din!  
With the slappings and the swishes,  
Creeping slowly and a thin  
Line of little forward breakers  
Licking onward up the sand  
Like the fingers of a hand  
Tapping where they'll soon be takers  
For the sea has grabbed the land.  
Up beyond the sand and eel-grass  
Is a sunny little town  
Built of palm-tree and palmetto.  
It's a city here *in petto*,  
With its huts all golden brown,  
And above, upon the thatches  
Of its roofs are purple patches

Where the bougainvillea's sown  
Light-heeled seeds to wax and bloom there,  
Always finding ample room there  
For the forest's fleecy down.  
Here were Indians long ago  
In the days before a prow,  
Topped by carven saint or sinner,  
Sailed across the Spanish Main.  
When the caravels and galleons  
Of an overweening Spain  
Had not found the precious metals  
Of the Incas, or in vain  
Wasted men and blood and treasure  
Forcing Indians from their leisure  
Just to glut the greed of gain.  
When the opal orchid petals  
Were no scientific find,  
But a shimmer in the wind.  
Ere the feet of dappled stallions

Set the print of iron shoe  
On a sandy sunken shore,  
But the dappled stallions waited  
All in vain, for they were fated  
To recross the sea no more.  
And their masters often died  
Waiting with them, side by side,  
An emaciated crew.  
All that happened long ago.  
Now the vessels, to and fro,  
Come as punctually as clock-work  
Or at least they mean to do.  
And they carry under hatches  
All things needed by the cities  
They have planted on the sands.  
And the monasteried monks,  
Hearing tales in quiet cells,  
Whispered low in broken snatches  
To an undertone of bells

From some wanderer overseas,  
Find their hearts moved by strange pities  
At the listening to these,  
And they volunteer in bands  
To convert the simple dwellers  
Of these unimagined lands,  
Worshipping as they should not.  
Manner bringers, pardon sellers,  
Vessels carry them in hordes  
With a zeal that's piping hot.  
Bishops lay aside their croziers,  
Hew palmettos into boards,  
Build them churches as a duty,  
Fill them with whatever booty  
They can find of silk or wax,  
Woollen fabric, cloth of flax,  
Goods of tailors, mercers, hosiers,  
In the bottoms that come in,  
And for payment wink at sin.

So the church grows, hung with feathers  
Woven by the tired Indians,  
Lined with these and Spanish leathers,  
For at bargains none are keener  
Than the potentates of churches.  
So it was with Carthage.  
On a hill that rises straightly  
From the town, it stands in stately  
Isolation, gazing far  
All across the stretching ocean.  
Privateers and men of war,  
Lost in reckoning, see its spire  
Burning like a sacred fire  
From the broad-leaved palms which rise  
Just to where the windowed eyes  
Stare forever out to sea.  
And the captain calls his people,  
Points to where that far-off shining  
Glitters like a distant star,



Tells them, not without emotion,  
That he knows now where they are,  
They may cease their long repining  
For that shimmering has been a  
Joy to many, 'tis the steeple  
Of the Church of Carthagera.  
Sailors call the sunny flame  
By another, fragrant name:  
When the sparkle in the sky  
First appears, they raise a cry  
"Look! It is our Lady's eye!"  
"The Madonna of the Ships" —  
So she is to sailors' lips.  
And indeed she is a sweetly  
Lovely image, most discreetly  
Veiled in gauzy stars and roses  
With an iridescent cloak,  
Made, at least so one supposes,  
Noticing its changing sheen —

Ruby sometimes, sometimes green —  
Of the wings of humming-birds.  
From the hem of it, there poke  
Little shoes of gold and blue,  
Sewn with gems, not one or two,  
But a toe-full flashing through  
The beholder's head as though  
He were watching the rainbow.  
On her head a crown is set  
Where great moons of carven jet  
Are in fact no jet at all,  
But black opals; and the fall  
Of her wimple wrought of lace  
Half obscures her wondrous face.  
Only half, for there's her mouth,  
And her nose, an awkward feature  
For so heavenly a creature:  
There's a sauciness of shape,  
And the tip points upward slyly,

But her mouth is most demurely  
Small and wistful, yet to see it  
Is to know a sudden drouth.  
But the priest, who's old and wily,  
If you question him says, "Surely  
God has ordered, and so be it!"  
Glorious, excellent Madonna,  
She of ships, and furious oceans,  
Here at the Antipodes,  
How should she resemble these  
Dim Cathedral Virgins, hearing  
Ancient fly-blown sins forever,  
Snivelled into their dull ears  
For eternities of years.  
Sins here have a different flavour.  
We must cast our hide-bound notions  
Of her manner of appearing.  
Here she is in perfect semblance  
Of what she should be, her lips

Frame her name, or its resemblance:

“The Madonna of the Ships.”

But there is a curious story

You may hear about the streets.

Though they tell it to her glory,

Every second man one meets

Winks his eye when you address him

Speaking of her brave attire,

And if you go on and press him,

He will cross himself and say

’Tis no wonder, for the day

That the pirate ship caught fire

At the entrance of the bay

Was when last the priests arrayed her

Newly for a festival

Offered for the town’s escape

From a sacking; they displayed her

In the morning. All agape,

Lacking reason's wherewithal  
To digest this information,  
You may beg for farther light  
On so dim a revelation.  
But your man is nothing loth,  
For his city's praise and pride,  
To detail upon his oath  
What no citizen will hide:  
The possession of a Blessing  
Such as nowhere else can be,  
Not in any place soever  
All along that spacious sea,  
At no river-mouth or harbour  
Of that many-harboured sea.  
So you learn that that same night  
For a space of several hours  
The high altar was deserted,  
Not a trace of waxen image,  
Only dropped and withered flowers

Shaken from her feather cape.  
Then the church's doors were closed,  
But a panic was averted  
For the priests gave out she dozed  
Being weary. All that night  
The priests knelt and said their masses,  
Swung their censers left and right,  
Moved before the empty altar  
With their passes and repasses,  
And their sacred psalms and droning.  
A great wind outside was moaning,  
And the whirled palmettos scratching  
On the walls, their great leaves catching  
In the flimsy window shutters.  
Streams of rain poured from the gutters.  
One young priest began to falter  
Fearing doom or miracle,  
Or a Demon out of Hell.  
But his fellows chanted on

Orison for orison.

Suddenly a fearful gale

Shook the church, and furious hail

Rattled on the wooden roof,

Like a squad of eager devils

Spitting flame from horn to hoof

Showering down a thousand evils.

And a window burst asunder.

There was heard a peal of thunder,

A distracting, dooming thunder,

Bearing omen in its rolling,

Tolling dolefully and slowly,

While the church stood slightly under

This reverberate and wholly

Overhanging dome of thunder.

Every joist and rafter quivered,

And the leather hangings shivered.

So protracted was the thunder,

Such an everlasting thunder,

That the priests both old and young  
Were quite paralyzed of tongue,  
And they ceased their weary singing,  
Saying nothing after that.  
Truth to tell, they fell down flat.  
Each one wanted to be hid,  
None saw what the others did.  
Each priest's eyes were shut, each prayed.  
But the storm seemed to be laid.  
For a perfect calm was there,  
Not a flutter nicked the air  
Which appeared to hold its breath  
Folding round them like a wreath  
From the open window where  
The palmetto leaf hung in  
Still as stone, but dripping wet.  
And the dripping made a noise  
Like a nail which strikes on tin  
Or a tinkling little bell



Palpitating for a spell  
From some lonely hermitage  
At the bottom of a dell.  
And the pause endured an age,  
Till each priest was moved to see,  
Dared once more to look and see,  
What that tinkling noise might be.  
And they saw the altar set  
For high mass and on it standing  
Their dear Lady, and her poise  
Was that of a flying gull  
Just an instant after landing.  
The priests gasped: "A Miracle!"  
Sobbing, kneeling down before  
Their Madonna, on the floor.  
But the image made no sign,  
Only her far-looking eyes  
Gazed upon them with benign  
Pleasantness, as one who sighs

And, in sighing, smiles again,  
Pitiful to mortal men.  
But they might not long indulge  
Their great wonder and alarm,  
Which no telling may divulge,  
Seeing her escaped from harm.  
For the old priest bade them haste  
To relieve their Lady's plight  
From the ravage of the night.  
She was mud from foot to waist,  
In her crown long weeds were tangled,  
One of her bejewelled shoes  
Was not there, and sea-shells jangled  
Caught upon her feathered dress.  
No time this to stare and pray,  
Even though the wits confuse,  
She must be well comforted,  
Cherished, cosseted, and tended  
Now her voyaging is ended,

Bathed, and combed, and clothed, and fed  
With the sacred wine and bread.  
Awed before her holiness,  
Frightened priests ran to obey,  
Getting in each other's way  
In their eagerness to serve her,  
Be the one most to deserve her.  
In the end the task was done;  
And the instant that the sun,  
Calculated to exalt her,  
Shone upon the wooden altar,  
There they placed her reverently,  
Crossing breast and bowing knee  
To their "Lady of the Sea"  
Blazoned in new finery.  
When the clock that hung inside  
The tall steeple stood at ten,  
The church door was opened wide,  
Everyone could enter then,

And the priests were told the news:  
How the pirates nearly came  
To the city, when a flame  
Burst up from their nearing ship;  
How they let the cable slip  
Trying to put the fire out;  
How the ship went on the shore  
Lacking room to put about;  
That the drowned were a full score,  
And the others clapped in jail.  
So the populace filed slowly  
Past the altar, meek and lowly,  
Saying "Mary, Mary, Hail!"  
And the young priest, cold and pale,  
Whispered the thing that befell,  
How it was a miracle!  
But the old priest said, "'Tis well,"  
Joining ancient finger-tips,  
"Bless our Lady of the Ships!"

## TUNE

THERE's a lilt abroad in my head to-night

Like a nodding columbine,

It joins to no words, it draws no breath

From any idea of mine.

Yet it crosses and recrosses through my brain

With a sweetness of mulberry wine.

There are tapping red heels in the heart of this tune,

And the flirt of flickered fans,

There are meadows a-spray with a buttercup June

And halted caravans,

Where a gipsy fiddle cries "down the middle"

To a light that is Aldebaran's.

'Tis a tune to wake mummied kings and make

Fra Angelico's angels by scores

Cease their harping and hymns and indulge in the  
whims

Of a *bal masqué*, Louis Quatorze,  
Where the little devils of rhythm perch  
On the shoes of ambassadors.

Pavans? No! No! Nor sarabands,  
Nor minuets for me.  
But capriccioso, a stamping bolero  
With a crowd come in to see,  
And the moon winking over a curtain's edge  
Like a peeping Tom Mercury.

Not a thought, no words, not anything  
But a lilt in my head to-night.  
Inconsequent as a butterfly's wing  
Or the skim of a meteorite.  
Put me down as the slave of a toss and a tune  
A humble neophyte

With the trees and the breeze, as Terpsichore's  
Dedicate eremite.

But, listen, the gusty wind is hushed,  
The corn is stiff and still,  
The moon like a beetle upside down  
Sheds no more light on the hill,  
And a little goblin spirited thought  
Steals in against my will  
Arousing me to the sight of inimical day.  
Give the goblin creature its breakfast then, I say,  
And loaded with morning I crawl upon my way  
To the world where men ravel and rave but none of  
    them dares to play.

## GRIEVANCE

ALL these years I have remembered a night  
When islands ran black into a sea of silk,  
A bay and an open roadstead set to a shimmer like  
    cool, white silk  
Under an August moon.  
Trees lifted themselves softly into the moonlight,  
A vine on the balcony glittered with a scattered bril-  
    liance,  
The roofs of distant houses shone solidly like ice.  
Wind passed,  
It touched me.  
(The touch of the wind was cool, impersonal;  
The fingers of the wind brushed my face and left me.  
I remember that I shivered,  
And that the long, continuous sound of the sea be-  
    neath the cliff



Seemed the endless breathing of the days I must live  
through alone.

I grieve for that night as for something wasted.

You are with me now, but that was twenty years ago,

And the future is shortened by many days.

• I no longer fear the length of them,

I dread the swiftness of their departure.

But they go — go —

With the thunderous rapidity of a waterfall,

And scarcely can we find a slow, cool night

To consider ourselves,

And the peaceful shining of the moon

Along a silken sea.

## PARADOX

You are an amethyst to me,  
Beating dark slabs of purple  
Against quiet smoothnesses of heliotrope,  
Sending the wine-colour of torches  
Rattling up against an avalanche of pale windy  
leaves.

You enter my heart as twilight  
Seeping softly among the ghosts of beeches  
In a glade where the last light cleaves for an instant  
upon the swung lash of a waterfall.  
You oversweep me with the splendid flashing of your  
darkness,  
And my flowers are tinted with the light of your thin  
grey moon.

An amethyst garden you are to me,  
And in your sands I write my poems,  
And plant my heart for you in deathless yew trees  
That their leaves may shield you from the falling snow.

Open your purple palaces for my entertainment,  
Welcome my feet upon your polished floors,  
And keep in your brazier always  
One red hot coal;  
For I come at the times which suit me,  
Morning or evening,  
And I am cold when I come down the long alleys to  
you.

Clang the doors against the multitude who would  
follow me.

Is not this my chamber where I would sleep?

## HIPPOCRENE

WITH you,

I sup on singing birds

And drink hot sunlight cooled with clouds.

With you,

I ride the slanting winds,

Toss coloured balls back and forth over the moon,

Swing up through trees,

And slide down swiftly upon beds of irises.

When you are here,

we stack words at the end of a rainbow

And bowl at them with swans' eggs.

We run races through grass

to old bronze temples,

And sitting under marble porches,  
Count daisy petals  
to the tapping of a bell.

We leap from steeples,  
And land in flowered palaces.

In cedar-scented parlours you tell me tales,  
Long, slow tales,  
strummed lightly on a lute;  
And I lie on blue cushions and watch the sea  
and hear your voice.

With you,  
I do all these things —  
How therefore should I care  
to gabble with the donkey-men,  
To gossip with the old women  
who sell turkeys,

To watch my next-door neighbour plait her hair  
and lament the untoward price of butter.

Until you come I will sit here  
alone, by a quiet window,  
And, with a fine brush,  
trace little pictures  
To show when you return.

## THORN PIECE

CLIFFS,

Cliffs,

And a twisted sea

Beating under a freezing moon.

Why should I,

Sitting peaceful and warm,

Cut my heart on so sharp a tune?

Liquid lapping of seething fire

Eating the heart of an old beech-tree.

Crack of icicles under the eaves,

Dog-wind whining eerily.

The oaks are red, and the asters flame,

And the sun is warm on bark and stones.

There's a Hunter's Moon abroad to-night —

The twigs are snapping like brittle bones.

You carry a lantern of rose-green glass,  
Your dress is red as a Cardinal's cloak.  
I kneel at the trace of your feet on the grass,  
But when I would sing you a song, I choke.

Choke for the fragile careless years  
We have scattered so easily from our hands.  
They flutter like leaves through an Autumn sun,  
One by one, one by one.

I have lived in a place,  
I shall die in a place,  
I have no craving for distant lands.  
But a place is nothing, not even space,  
Unless at its heart a figure stands

Swinging a rose-green lantern for me.  
I fear the fall of a rose-green gate,



And the cry of a cliff-driven, haunted sea,  
And the crackle of ice while I wait — wait!

Your face is flowers and singing sun,  
Your hands are the cool of waters falling.  
If the rose-green bars should drop between  
Would you know that I was calling?

For the stars I see in that sky are black.  
The kind earth holds me and laughs in my ear.  
I have nothing to do with the planet's track,  
I only want you, my Dear.

Beyond is a glaze, but here is fire,  
And love to comfort, and speech to bind,  
And the common things of morning and evening,  
And the light of your lantern I always find.

One or the other — then let it be me,

For I fear the whirl of the cliff-wrung sea,  
And the biting night. You smile at my fears,  
But the years — years —  
Like leaves falling.

## ON CHRISTMAS EVE

WHAT is the thing I would say to you  
Ere the time when we can say nothing at all,  
Neither you to me nor I to you,  
And between us is sprung a smoky wall?  
If I am left, I shall push the mist  
And crack my eyes to a gimlet point  
Striving to pierce its every twist  
And bore a hole through some weakened joint.  
But I know very well it will disappoint  
My keenest urge, and I shall be left  
Baffled, forsaken, and blind to boot,  
But with still the feeling that in some cleft  
You linger and watch and maybe hear  
The dim and feeble substitute  
For speech which may travel from sphere to sphere  
And hold itself perpetual  
Merging the there and here.

I am counted one who is good at words,  
And yet, in placing my thought of you  
Where I can see it, hard and clear,  
This, that, and the other, in review,  
I think that only the songs of birds  
Are adequate for the task which I  
Can never even make the attempt  
To come at ever so haltingly.  
I earn my own contempt  
That I should presume to try.

You have lifted my eyes, and made me whole,  
And given me purpose, and held me faced  
Toward the horizon you once had placed  
As my aim's grand measure. Your starry truth  
Has shown me the worm-holes in Earth's apple,  
You have soothed me when I dared not look,  
And forced me on to seek and grapple

With the nightmare doubts which block the ways  
Of a matrix-breaking, visioning soul  
When, lacking the arrogance of youth,  
I started to carve the granite days  
Into tablets of a book.

The hundred kindly daily things,  
I have numbered them all though I may not speak  
them.

Sitting here on this Christmas Eve,  
I think of you asleep above,  
And the house has a gentleness which clings,  
And a wide content of love.  
What you have said and what you have done,  
I should not have known enough to seek them,  
But now the very rooms you leave  
Have a peace which hangs like a hyacinth scent  
All about them.

Your ways, your thoughts,

I would surely rather lose the sun  
Than be without them.  
So absolutely is it I am bent  
To know how you are excellent.

Dearest, I have written it down  
For your Christmas Day, but not half is said.  
I might write so long it would span the town  
And yet scarce mention more than a shred  
Of you and you, and you and me;  
And of all that I know so well to be,  
How wretchedly I have scratched the stone!  
You must know the end instead.

## A NEW YEAR'S CARD

EVERYONE has his fancies, I suppose,  
And to-night I should like to walk round a towered  
city  
Blowing a blue silver trumpet.  
Then, when all the people had run out  
To see me circling the walls  
Playing on a blue trumpet,  
I would stop and sing them a song all about your  
loveliness.  
I would make it of the flicker of the air and the sweep  
of the sun,  
And when I had finished, they would see you sitting  
on a cloud  
And know how far you surpassed others in every-  
thing.

But there is no towered city,  
And I have no blue trumpet,  
And those who meet you seem to feel about you much  
as I do without the aid of these accessories,  
Which proves how very useless a thing a poet is, after  
all.



## FACT

SEA-ROSES blowing on a high, white cliff  
Rayed out above their leaves, bent by a whiff  
Of salty wind. White snowdrops over snow.  
The colour of a field where violets grow.  
The tingling rings of honeysuckle bines.  
Cloud shadows drawing over Apennines.  
Young paper birches, with their lusted stems  
Brightening old woods. . . . But similes like these  
Are stock in trade with all poets. If you please,  
Therefore, we'll put aside such brummagem  
And merely state a proven certainty,  
Which is that you are fine exceedingly  
And all that matters in Heaven or Earth to me.

## HERALDIC

I HAVE often a vision of your face,  
Seen through the crossing branches of young trees.  
Your face, as a white, flowing water,  
At a little distance, beyond the reeds of a shallow  
shore.

Ironical, my lady, that Spring, the barb and whet-  
stone of my love,  
Should net you from me in leaves and whisperings!  
Yet I would not lose even this,  
Although the sight and leashing tease me to madness.

## QUINCUNX

A LADY was given a shell which kept in its convolu-  
tions

The dash and sucking of waves.

At first the lady played with it,

Putting it to her ear.

But soon tiring of this,

She gave it into the hands of a skilful carver

Who fashioned out of it an intaglio of great beauty;

This the lady set in a band of gold

And placed in a cabinet for all to admire.

Now people praise the delicate gem and pass on,

And it lies on its velvet,

Flat, and cold, and admirable;

But the fresh sound of waves

Is no longer about it.

## CARREFOUR

O You,

Who came upon me once

Stretched under apple-trees just after bathing,

Why did you not strangle me before speaking

Rather than fill me with the wild white honey of  
your words

And then leave me to the mercy

Of the forest bees.

## GRANADILLA

I CUT myself upon the thought of you  
And yet I come back to it again and again.  
A kind of fury makes me want to draw you out  
From the dimness of the present  
And set you sharply above me in a wheel of roses.  
Then, going obviously to inhale their fragrance,  
I touch the blade of you and cling upon it,  
And only when the blood runs out across my fingers  
Am I at all satisfied.

## CAUSTIC

CERTAINLY you gave me your heart,  
I don't in the least deny it.  
And a splendid heart it was,  
Of white sea jade strewn over with ochre shadings and  
polished to the tip touch of brilliance.  
I strung it on my watch-chain.  
But then, I seldom wear a watch nowadays;  
I do not need it to tell that the black sun  
Is sinking into a sea of garnet flame.

## ONE! TWO! THREE!

POEMS,

Poems,

What are poems but words

Set edgewise up like children's blocks

To build a structure no one can inhabit.

I fling you words,

Raw and bleeding

Out of my desolation.

Tock! Tock! The clock is no more monotonous than I,

Beating your name to every new vibration,

Aching upon remembrance with a durability

Which wears a knife-edge all along each shouting

nerve.

Day and night wind round upon my loneliness

Coiling me in a serpent strangle of time.

One morning opens like another:  
Sun on each wet bush and tree;  
They laugh and rustle,  
But I shut my eyes.  
How wide the sky is!  
And all that way the sun must go  
Before another day will have been ended.

Lamps, work, and sunrise,  
And again — again —  
Always again, and each day tastes like powder  
Brittle and salt.  
And each night goes like water  
Weeping along a heavy wall of stone.

And nothing comes.  
It cannot come,  
Since you are all that ever could have come.  
I count them — one, two, three, and ten's a bundle;



A tally of burnt sticks

A heap of twigs,

With not one little bell-flower nodding up between  
them.

So then I take my blocks

And neatly place them

One balancing another.

I mock that ghastly clock and make a cupola of win-  
dows

And out of each I gaze awhile

Looking down long roads for you.

Then I put in a paved forecourt-yard,

And lay my smoothest squares,

And plant wide borders of campanulas.

But what I plant is nothing;

What comes up

Is fire-weed.

How often have I seen it

Glaring above the silver-grey of rotted boards  
Where a deserted farmhouse  
Was falling gently,  
Each year a little more of it would settle.

Tush! This is fooling.

Words,

Words,

I think I hate them.

You cannot live in them,

And so they are no more to me

Than spiders' webs:

Tall, floating, ghostly webs,

Hanging above the candles of a church

When someone's to be buried.

Therefore I will put my words away,

And count the ticking of the clock

As men count pins in solitary cells.

To-morrow it may rain

And then, at least,

I shall not have to watch the terribly slow spanning

Of the sun

Across that reach of sky.

## ALTERNATIVES

You mistake me, Madame, I ask for nothing.  
I give arrogantly and with indifference.  
These are no wall-fruits, soft and sugary, I offer you,  
But dragon-berries,  
Burnt black with their own fire,  
Grown on brambles in the Courts of Destiny.  
You may refuse them if you please,  
Since choice is not denied you.  
Then you will be lone as a rattling leaf  
On an upland oak-tree,  
Flinging its single shadow  
Across a treeless snow.

## THRENODY

ON an evening of black snow  
I walked along the causeway,  
Wishing that I too might melt  
Between the agitated fingers  
Of a stuttering, intolerable sea.

## TANKA

ROSES and larkspur  
And slender, serried lilies;  
I wonder whether  
These are worth your attention.  
Consider it, and if not —

## REFLECTION

WHY does my clock persist in marking the hour after  
that which it is?

Scornful clock!

Do you wish to remind me that there is never any  
present,

Only a future and a long, long past?

## PASTIME

*"Whose pretty pawn is this,  
And what shall be done to redeem it?"*

CHILDREN'S GAME.

I AM immoderately fond of this place.

My thoughts run under it like the roots of trees and  
grasses,

They spread above it like fluttering, inconsequential  
leaves.

Spring comes to me with the blossoming of the snow-  
drop under the arbor-vitæ.

So all Springs come, and ever must do.

Spring ripens with the crocus cups on the South lawn,  
Blue and white crocuses, remains of an ancient garden,  
By the side of an ancient house —

So they told me, so I believed.

That shadowy structure holds a distant charm,  
I see its walls printed upon the air, in certain moods,  
And build it back into solidity with awed enjoyment.



But that is fairy-tale or history,  
And I am more concerned with recollection.

How perpetually the seasons mark themselves!

Tulips for April,

Peonies for May.

The pillar-rose has not lacked its robin's-nest since

I remember,

Nor the pink horse-chestnut its mob of honey-bees:

The boom of them is essence of sleep and flowers,

Of Summer sleep and poetry mixed together.

Yet there are differences even in the repeated lilt of

time.

I seem to think the humming-birds are fewer,

And I have not seen a luna-moth for years.

Now, suddenly, here is a grosbeak

Perched in the double-cherry near the door.

He suggests that I look him over,

His striped black and white,  
His rose-red triangle of waistcoat.  
He is clearly on view for commendation,  
Displaying himself as though I were his wife or his  
tailor

Observing to pronounce a verdict.  
I had contemplated second childhood,  
But scarcely believed it imminent,  
And here I am plunged in it.  
A rose-breasted grosbeak indeed,  
And the last I saw was in that long, first childhood.  
Senility may have its compensations,  
I shall hunt up my old butterfly-net  
And prowl about to-night seeking luna-moths.

## AFTER AN ILLNESS

TO A CAT FROM WHOM ONE HAS BEEN SEPARATED  
FOR A LONG TIME

I HAVE come back, Winky.  
After a long time — yes.  
There was a heavy sodden sea,  
And I in the midst of it.  
Before me, white snakes swam in a slime of seaweed.  
They drew their bodies through the seaweed with a  
dreadful rustle  
Like dead leaves on sand,  
And left long open lanes behind them  
Which glowed a clotted purple  
Under the rays of a bursting, half-sunk sun.  
Somewhere, on the right, were shores  
With high glass cliffs.  
The cliffs were hot and leapt up and down unceasingly,  
And the heat from them blistered my body

Even under the water as I swam.

A wind rose

And drove the weeds faster upon me,

And I struggled in fear of the snakes who came swiftly

— swiftly —

Then I sank down somewhere out of the sea

Into a place of mist.

I was blind,

But my ears were shrunken points of awareness,

I was anguished by the keenness of my ears,

For all round were loud voices

Shouting harsh, unintelligible things

Which I strove to understand, but could not.

I trod upon the voices,

But they shifted like pebbles beneath my feet.

I fought with them,

Flinging them from me,

Pushing them down with my hands.

At last I had them under me and I was rising —

I saw nothing, but I was rising —  
Then my mouth choked with salt,  
And the salt entered my eyes and unsealed them.  
Light was an explosion in my brain,  
And I floated again in the seaweed sea  
Under the bloody cliffs which leapt like flame.

Now I am sitting in a room again,  
With fire-light fluttering on the walls  
And you in my lap — purring.  
Little cat, are you as glad to have me to lie upon  
As I am to feel your fur under my hand?  
Your purr sounds like the blowing of feathers in a  
wind;  
It is a strangely comfortable sound,  
And there is no other,  
For the night smiles and says nothing.

## “RODE THE SIX HUNDRED”

A JUNE-BUG has just flown in through my window,  
And to-day I sat among narcissus and grape-hyacinths  
Drinking the sudden sun.

The terrible Winter has passed  
Flinging my garden full of flowers.  
But for me I think it will not be long,  
Not long,  
Before it is the end.

Ah, my flowers!

## THE SILENT HUSBAND

THE gifts of Heaven to you and me have not been  
equal.

You play your table-lute even when it is stringless,  
With the movement of your hands drawing forth the  
five-coloured sounds which delight you.

Your Unworthy One is dull,

She hears only what is.

I beg you, therefore, my Lord,

Speak the words which I am fain to believe abide in  
your heart.

THE "PLUM-BLOSSOM" CONCUBINE  
WRITES TO THE EMPEROR MING  
HUANG

I HAVE painted my eyebrows like willow-leaves to de-  
light you.

I have painted them like cassia-leaves to attract  
your fancy.

Now the leaves of all the trees have fallen,  
And snow hisses from the sky.

My Lord,

Could you look in this mirror,

You would see

My face, white as heaped snow,

My lips, red as a sunset

Between peaks of ice.



## OLD EXAMINATION HALL

## CHINA

THICKLY green is the moss on the corroded roof-tiles  
of this hall,

Loud, loud, the cry of the wind striking and moving  
the hinges of the old doors,

Silver as evening mist the spiders' webs spun about  
the corners.

They broke their hearts here, bending over the pen-  
brushes,

They tore their hearts upon the glittering words of  
the T'ang poets,

They went mad, babbling Confucius and Mencius to  
the cold clouds passing above an open window.

All this they did to wear a violet coat and a belt-clasp  
of agate stones set in rubies.

Now through the windy hall sucks a cadence of falling  
seas,

Seas withdrawn along an ancient shore,

Backward seas

Turned,

Running in great strides upon a bold and distant  
continent.

## PILLAR PRINTS

## THE CUT SHADOW

Who sees the metal of the Temple mirrors  
Across the blowing lustre of reflected trees?  
So those who look into my heart  
See only the faint, surging vision of your face.

## LUSTRE

Your face to me is like the slope of a snow-mountain  
In moonlight.  
You, too, I cannot look at steadily.

## ACCOLADE

“The garden was admirable,” she said, nine hundred  
years ago,  
And in saying so, made it immortal.

## GREEN SHADOWS

The moon on the very white sand of the garden

Is more pleasing to my eyes  
Than the silver embroidered dress of the Lady Yasu-  
rahi,  
Since she permits the Lieutenant-General of the  
Right Bodyguard  
To row her in his boat.

## DEBIT

Passing my nights with books,  
The morning moon brings a sad greeting.

## PAYMENT

After a night of labour  
Better a misty sky than a white sunrise.

## THE AUTUMN HEART

Faint and far the cry of the migrating geese,  
Neither do they come near my house.

## TO TWO UNKNOWN LADIES

LADIES, I do not know you, and I think  
I do not want to. And a strange beginning  
I make with that. Admitted; there's the odds.  
You live between the covers of a book,  
At least for me, but then I've known a crowd  
Of other people who do that. My mind  
Is stuffed with phantoms out of poets' brains.  
But you are out of nothing but the air,  
Or were, rather, for one of you is dead.  
Dead or alive, it is the same to me,  
Since all our contact lies in printer's ink.

But even this, peculiar as it is,  
Is but a thread of singularity.  
Here is another, that I see you double,  
Each one beheld in profile, as it were.

And yet the full-face view is not composite,  
But shows two totally specific halves  
Which do not blend and still are not distinct.  
And again why should I perplex my eyes  
With trying so hard to draw you both together  
As though you were a lighted candle, split  
Upon an oculist's dissecting spectacles?

You see the thing is really not so simple  
As A.B.C., or Keats, or "Christabel,"  
And that is where the plague comes in for me.  
For here, sitting quite calmly in my chair,  
Settled down comfortably to an evening's reading,  
I open up the queerest possibility,  
Namely: the visitation of a ghost.  
Suppose I throw you down the glove at once  
And say I'm haunted, does that bring the answer?  
If so, it blurs beyond what I can grasp  
And foggy answers leave us where we were.

If either of you much attracted me  
We could fall back upon phenomena  
And make a pretty story out of psychic  
Balances, but not to be too broad  
In my discourtesy, nor prudish neither  
(Since, really, I can hardly quite suppose  
With all your ghostliness you follow me),  
I feel no such attraction. Or if one  
Bows to my sympathy for the briefest space,  
Snap — it is gone! And, worst of all to tell,  
What broke it is not in the least dislike  
But utter boredom.

Now I acknowledge you are sensible,  
And so I put it squarely; is there not  
A strange absurdity in being haunted  
By ghosts who crack one's jaws upon a yawn?  
If that were all of it! But nothing's all.

For just as I am oozing into sleep,  
See-sawing gently out of consciousness,  
A phrase of yours will laugh out loud and clang  
Me broad awake. And still there's more to come:  
Sometimes I catch the faintest whiff of flutes.  
And that I hold to be a paradox.

Did ever ladies lead so dull a life  
As you? At least according to my taste  
(I'll be polite enough to put it so).  
You wrote, but, Great Saint Peter, tell me how!  
With half a destiny. Now we, poor devils,  
Fill our ink-wells with entrails, pour our veins  
To wet a pencil point, and end at last  
As shrivelled as a pod of money-wort,  
And (let me say this in a neat aside)  
We hope as shining. So do artists live,  
And skulls are best when turned to flower-pots.



Now your way: Half a year, or more, or less;  
A book tossed off between two sets of tennis,  
Or jotted down some morning of hard frost  
When the hounds could not run. Pale Jesus Christ,  
Is this an effort worthy to be classed  
Beyond the writing of cake recipes?  
One of you painted. Well, you have no shame  
To call such trash a picture. Years and years  
You studied with the patient, stupid zeal  
Of every amateur, and to this day  
You never guess how badly you have done.

You speak of music, and my nerve-ends sting  
Thinking of Chopin sentimentalized  
By innocent young ladyhood; of Liszt  
Doted upon, his tinsel rhodomontade  
Held for high romance. And the ghastly nights  
On cracked hotel pianos! It would be  
Experience to read of washier stuff.

And yet — and yet — this clearly is not all.  
Or why should I go back to you again,  
Evening and evening, in a kind of thirst,  
Surprising my tongue upon an almond taste.

A puzzling business. Everything comes back  
And hooks upon a question. I suspect  
Myself of cheating, stacking a full pack  
With diamond Jacks extraordinary and Queens  
Of Spades enough to make a declaration  
Of quite superb inviolability.  
But if the pack were dealt again, what then?  
So what's the truth behind my set of it,  
If I can keep my eyes clear long enough  
To get a squint thereat? Almonds, I said,  
Smooth, white, and bitter, wonderfully almonds.

Your fingers were unequal to the task  
Of fashioning pictures, they were not enough.

For pictures take the whole and whip it round  
To something out of you; and this you could  
Contrive, but not as artists, since this thing  
Was not your making. You were pigment, line.  
I will not split you up to parts and parts,  
Suffice it that the pictures here are you.  
Double and single, like chrysanthemums,  
Each of one family, but with just differences  
Of colour and habit and the arch of stem.

Two halves, I said, and here I patterned rightly.  
A frail half and a virile, but both shoots  
Of one straight mother tree. It is your nobleness  
That shocks a fire across these photographs  
And makes them a contentment for strained eyes  
Hurt by the ugliness of crowds in streets,  
Stumbling short-sighted in a group of gargoyles.  
You might have posed for caryatides,  
With wind-drawn garments sucking round your limbs,

Your beauty blushing through their flattened gauze,  
Before a temple, on a sunny day.

I wonder I am Greek enough to feel  
Such solace in mere outline. But again,  
As always where I find you are concerned,  
This does not finish your effect. For when  
I write down Greek, it is inadequate.  
Marble you are, but there's that jet of fire  
Like a red sunset on a fall of snow.  
I feel a wind blowing off heather hills,  
Am vaguely conscious of the moan of waves,  
And seaweed fronds pulsating in a pool.  
Now this, of course, is anything but Greek.

Horses and dogs! You say yourself that they  
Are stuck with limpet-closeness to your life.  
And there, I think, is more than parallel.  
For dogs and horses have a wistfulness,

A pathos, in their bursts of gaiety  
Which tears the heart, even when crinky-tail  
Sets dogs in bundles racing round a lawn,  
Or snaps a horse's feet to jiggling springs  
Cat-dancing with a sudden twitch of ears.  
And you are both like that, for your jokes bob  
Under taut flags across a bay of tears.

That figure is so old, I feel a twinge  
Of hot compunction at using it again.  
But even artists stub their toes sometimes  
Upon the fallen centuries, and Helen  
Was much considered by the youth of Troy.  
I think perhaps your prototypes in Sparta  
Called forth that metaphor. But let it pass.  
It is a fact that my eyes itch and burn  
At this of you on horseback. Foolish! Oh,  
Shall you call it folly at this time of day,  
You, who tell tales of banshees in a park!

Again a facet. Like a lapidary  
I cut and cut in microscopic flakes,  
But never get the gem for all these sides.  
There's more to you than single flesh and blood  
Though these be fine and clear as new-stripped  
almonds.

And more than tears; but what it is drifts out  
Beyond the surf-line of my consciousness  
And blurs in dazzle so I lose its edge.  
The puzzle grows as I unravel it,  
For all these feelings come out of a book  
And you, who cannot write, have written it.

There's food for many solitary munchings,  
And sticks to beat an artist's soul withal.  
You cannot write, and look what you have written:  
Two lives which stare and twinkle on the page  
So that I blind in looking. That's a glare

To put out farthing candles of professionals.  
Had I not seen your drawings, I might almost  
Have been bewitched by that hotel piano  
And guessed you better understood your Chopin.  
Now I am all at sea again and clinging  
To horses and a cat-leap at a fence.

Well, there it stands, and what I get is life,  
And love held back and breaking up and out.  
Your heart is never on your sleeve, you say;  
But try your hardest, it is in your pen,  
And death is nothing to vitality  
Swinging across a second heart. At best  
One sees a breeding like those draperies  
Which cool my naked caryatides.  
Why, I'm not dead, but merely gone in space  
And that you slap away with easy hand  
Drawing me closer much than you intend.

Perhaps the very queerest of these facts  
Is that I feel apologies are due  
For just this thing which wakes my admiration.  
You do not want me crowding in behind  
That carefully embroidered sleeve, and yet  
What I behold mounts to a blazing altar,  
And both are there before it, worshipping.  
Will you forgive this little pinch of incense,  
For one of you is dead and she will know,  
Perhaps, at least, what magic brought me here.  
And I will never seek to meet the other,  
I only write to exorcise a ghost.



## WRITTEN ON THE REVERSE

HE told me, one night, when we were off duty,  
And with a pride which might have been Lord Nelson's  
Detailing Emma to a fellow Admiral —  
Only that's one thing Nelson never did —  
And Lady Hamilton was gold and rubies  
While this girl was a circus-rider's spangles,  
As real as they, at least not one whit more so,  
And he, poor boy, as far from Nelson's honour.  
Well, there you have it, tucked up in our tent,  
Propping our spurs against an iron stove-pipe  
And talking as I'm wishing now we hadn't.  
But he was at it, and I couldn't stop him.  
I swear the fellow's talk became quite lyric,  
A sort of chucking stars, and into sawdust —  
It seemed to me the lady was no better;  
She scuffled underneath a press of footsteps,

His among others. I had liked him hugely.  
A great, big, honest, rather clumsy chap,  
Just off of middle-age, and such a baby,  
Playing the soldier in a uniform,  
And playing it damned well, you understand;  
We had no better in the regiment.  
I used to chuckle just to see him acting  
His own ideal. But somehow as I listened  
The folly in him rasped upon my nerves.  
What right had he to be so innocent  
To whip a tawdry intrigue up to poetry  
And set me shivering who had not got it.  
He painted her exactly. I could see  
Not only what he said, but what he didn't.  
I guessed the sort of scented talcum-powder  
Kind of a woman who had picked him up.  
Cheap smartness, one who pats her hair in order  
Before shop-windows, and pays for what she buys  
With crumpled bills fished from a small mesh purse

Whose gold is gilding and wearing off at that;  
Add, too, a passion for gold-tipped cigarettes  
And blue-sashed bon-bon boxes. But she was shrewd,  
I knew as much because he was so pleased —  
With her, of course, and also with himself.  
He saw her Cleopatra on high Nile  
Floating between blue lupins, graciously  
According to him, Anthony, her heart.  
And that was just the way he wasn't Nelson,  
Who saw her Emma — and nothing else at all.  
The thing stopped there, it seemed, for he was married

And decent enough before she came, I know.  
He filled the ache in him with high-falutin,  
I wondered how long that would satisfy  
And felt his charmer would draw him farther in  
To cheques of somewhat high denomination  
Paid, naturally, upon receipt of value.  
Well, when he took to glowing like the sun

Upon a hayrick on a Summer morning  
I thought the lady had achieved her figure.  
But what I didn't reckon was just the man.  
The thing was epic to him now, I saw.  
War and his love — a fearful combination  
To snarl the simple structure of his life.  
He twisted to it and turned upon himself  
With such a marvellous gyration, that in some way  
He pulled it up to grandeur, and he a-top  
Mystically bright and crowned with bitter laurel.  
And all the time, behind, there was his wife.  
He got her so at last, fuddled his wits  
To it, that she became the smirch upon  
His unique glory. I used to marvel at the paradox  
He'd hung cocooning round him, but so it was.  
The fellow grew to something greatly larger  
Than I could have believed. I never said  
This was a moral tale, you understand,  
It's simply true.

Well, we went over, both  
In the same company, I Captain to his Lieutenant.  
And, in due course, were sent on to the front.  
A month went by, and then a bit of shell  
Took him between the shoulder-blades and gouged  
Into a lung and stayed there. We were caught,  
A handful of us, right between barrages.  
I'd got a leg, or rather hadn't one,  
So there we sat, and cursed, and bled, and died.  
I didn't, you observe. Worse luck, perhaps.  
I'll never get the joy that fellow had  
Coughing, and spitting, and whimpering her name.  
He met that shell toting a wounded sergeant  
Through our barrage, and, coming back, it hit.  
Tough luck? Oh, I don't know. He had his time.  
When the delirium struck him, I covered my ears,  
Hearing a man like that is too close cornered,  
Like something naked hurting you with beauty.  
It ended then for him, but I came home.

His wife was cool and stately as a widow.  
The talcum-powder lady changed her man.  
And yet I think the person was an artist  
To carve a hero out of what he was  
When she first ran across him. I wonder sometimes  
What she can think about it. As for me,  
I always give it up at just this point.  
Poor dear old chap, God bless his silly soul.

## SILHOUETTE WITH SEPIA BACKGROUND

HE moved in, with two thousand books, and a bed,  
and an armchair,

Into a little room under the roof of the great building  
with the pointed, carved stone doorway.

At eleven o'clock precisely, he would come out of the  
pointed stone doorway

And cross the street to the Common to feed the squir-  
rels,

Then he would wander on to the Public Garden to  
gaze at the geometrical flower-beds.

He did this every day, and the orange-vendor at the  
corner told the time by him; it saved crossing  
Tremont Street to look up at the clock on  
Park Street Church.

One morning he did not come, and the traffic policeman missed him,

So did the park policeman, and they talked about it together when they should have been minding their business.

On the second day, they spoke to the orange-vendor, but he knew nothing;

It would have been wiser to ask the pigeons who fly everywhere, but they never thought of that.

On the third day, they consulted the janitor, and, come to think of it, the janitor had not seen him either.

Then the janitor and the park policeman (for the traffic policeman dared not leave his post)

Went upstairs together ever so high, a flight higher than the elevator ran.

They had to break in the door, but that was no great thing,

It was an old door, and rickety.



They found him sitting quietly in his chair, with the  
book he had been reading fallen on the floor  
beside him.

He had been dead three days, but only the pigeons  
knew that.

## AQUATINT FRAMED IN GOLD

Six flights up in an out-of-date apartment house  
Where all the door-jambs and wainscots are of black  
walnut

And the last tenant died at the ripe age of eighty.

Tick-tock, the grandfather's clock,

Crowded into a corner against the black walnut  
wainscot.

Surrounded by the household gods of her family for  
three generations:

Teak-wood cabinets, rice-paper picture books, slim,  
comfortless chairs of spotted bamboo.

Too many house gods for the space allotted them,  
exuding an old and corroding beauty, a beauty  
faded and smelling of the past.

Tick-tock, the grandfather's clock,

Accurately telling the time, but forgetting whether  
it is to-day or yesterday.

Sleeping every night in a walnut bedstead  
With a headboard like the end of a family pew;  
Waking every morning to the photographs of dead  
relations,

Dead relations sifted all over the house,  
Accumulated in drifts like dust or snow.

Tick-tock, the grandfather's clock,  
Indifferently keeping up an old tradition,  
Unconcernedly registering the anniversaries of ill-  
nesses and deaths,

But omitting the births, they were so long ago.

The lady is neither young nor old,  
She walks like a wax-work among her crumbling  
possessions.

She is automatic and ageless like the clock,

And she, too, is of a bygone pattern.  
She sits at her frugal dinner,  
Careful of its ancient etiquette,  
Opposite the portrait of a great-aunt  
Done by a forgotten painter.  
The portrait lived once, it would seem,  
To judge by the coquetry of its attire;  
But the lady has always been a wax-work,  
Of no age in particular,  
But of an unquestioned ancestry.  
    Tick-tock, the grandfather's clock,  
    Ironically recording an hour of no importance.

## MINIATURE

BECAUSE the little gentleman made nautical instruments

And lived in a street which ran down to the sea,  
The neighbours called him "Salt Charlie."

I wonder what they would have said if they had  
known

That he stole out every evening to a sweet-shop  
And bought sticks of red-and-white sugar candy.  
It was a pleasant thing to see him,  
Standing meekly before the custom-house,  
Sucking a sugar-stick,  
And gazing at the dead funnels of anchored steamers  
Against a star-sprung sky.

I thought of him in an oval gilt frame  
Against sprigged wall-paper,

Done in Fra Angelico pinks and blues

Of a clear and sprightly elegance.

Wherefore, being convinced of his value as ornament,

I have set him on paper for the delectation

Of sundry scattered persons

Who consider such things important.

## EASEL PICTURE

## DECORATION DAY

SHE is a washerwoman most of the time,

But to-day she is a widow.

Important distinction, which warrants a plaintive  
manner

And her best black bombazine.

To be sure, she is only a plain widow,

And her husband was a drunkard who ill-treated her,

But she never forgets that it is owing to him that she  
ranks third in the cemetery,

Next to the war-widows and gold-starred mothers.

She regrets that he did not enlist

Instead of lying about his age and dying coldly of  
pneumonia,

Until she reflects that he might have returned from  
overseas and beaten her according to custom.

The thought purges her of envy, and she sprinkles  
    woe-begone, contented tears

On the bell-glass of artificial flowers she lays on his  
    grave;

It is a beautiful offering and has been much admired.

With a blissful sense of bereavement, she bows her  
    head over the bell-glass,

Then rises to totter to the gate on the arm of a friend  
    who has offered to give her a lift home.

In her attic room, she carefully folds the bombazine,  
Whispering to herself: "It was a beautiful Decoration  
    Day."



## THE IRONY OF DEATH

## A FUNERAL

You were always so vigorous,  
And your mind was as full of movement as your body.  
When you sprang over rocks and boulders,  
Or pushed waist-high through the fern,  
I used to envy your strength,  
And your buoyant lightness.  
You were a true pagan  
And Nature was your God.  
You had no use for other gods,  
And said so.  
The day before you died you said so,  
And you died bravely as you had lived,  
With the farewell of a staunch comrade upon your lips.  
I went to the funeral which they gave you.

No other of your real friends was there,  
This was not the manner in which they were used to  
    meet you.  
The room was crowded with your husband's colleagues  
    and their wives,  
And people who had come for the sake of appearances.  
We were shut in the stifling room,  
With the scent of the flowers on your coffin.  
A clergyman read the funeral service  
Which you despised,  
And the flowers wilted in the hot air.  
Then I knew that you were dead  
And I was glad,  
For you would have wept to see how your foolish  
    husband exposed his soul  
In his endeavour to give you a proper funeral.

## THE GRAVE

I LEFT the horse outside,  
For there were no roads in the little graveyard,  
No paths,  
Only a disorder of gravestones,  
And moss, and ragged grass,  
And broken twigs fallen from the trees overhead.  
The ground was hummocked and hollowed  
Between the gravestones,  
And I stumbled among them  
Reading the inscriptions  
To guide me.  
Your monument was to be designed by a great architect  
They had told me,  
But not yet, although you had been dead four months.  
Such things require consideration.

So I went from stone to stone,  
Seeking the child's grave  
Near which they had laid you.  
Suddenly I tripped,  
And jerking forward to save myself  
On the uneven ground,  
I saw in front of me two fruit jars  
Leaning crookedly against each other,  
And half-full of water foul to the colour of tobacco  
juice.

They were smeared with the splashings of rain,  
And the rims of the covers were red with rust;  
In one a leaf was still clinging to a dying stalk,  
In the other the stalk was quite dead.  
Above them a tablet to a dead child  
Was let into a rock.

## THE MIRROR

OPAQUE because of the run mercury at its back,  
White with a breath of yellow, like tarnished silver,  
The old mirror hangs over the chimney-piece  
Incased in its carved frame, and reflects the room beneath.

It is warped and bulging, because of the great fires  
Of other years; and dim with the sun shining in it  
every Spring.

Old men and children move before it, and it reflects  
them all,

Pulling them this way and that in its uneven surface.  
The pictures pass over it like mist over a morning  
window,

And it hangs in its carved frame, tarnished and  
beautiful,

And reflects everything.

## PORTRAIT OF AN ORCHESTRA LEADER

A YOUNG man on a platform?

A white flame upreared in a silver dish,

Swaying to the wind of horns and oboes,

Bending to the undulate waves of violins.

Do you think you see a young man in a swallow-  
tailed coat leading an orchestra?

I tell you it is a white, pointed flame in a silver dish.

## PORTRAIT

(E. R. B.)

THIS lady is like a grass-blade sheathed in ice,  
Like hoar-frost running along the borders of a formal  
garden.

She is like violets under the misted glass of a cold  
frame

On an Autumn morning with the sun scarcely above  
the trees.

The air has a smart twinge to it, I think,  
And the asters are black and broken;  
But what can equal the glitter of the frosty grass-  
blades,  
Held to a rigid radiance,  
Bent and motionless,  
Answering nothing to the wind?

No, do not lift the frames.

The violets are a lovely touch of colour,

And I would rather forego the scent of them  
Than run the risk of their freezing.



## MAGNOLIA GARDENS

CHARLESTON, S.C.

It was a disappointment,  
For I do not like magenta,  
And the garden was a fire of magenta  
Exploding like a bomb into the light-coloured peace  
of a Spring afternoon.

Not wistaria dropping through Spanish moss,  
Not cherokees sprinkling the tops of trees with moon-  
shaped stars,

Not the little pricked-out blooms of banksia roses,  
Could quench the flare of raw magenta.

Rubens women shaking the fatness of their bodies  
In an opulent egotism  
Till the curves and colours of flesh  
Are nauseous to the sight,  
So this magenta.

Hateful,

Reeking with sensuality,

Bestial, obscene —

I remember you as something to be forgotten.

But I cherish the smooth sweep of the colourless river,

And the thin, clear song of the red-winged blackbirds

In the marsh-grasses on the opposite bank.

## A SOUTH CAROLINA FOREST

HUSH, hush, these woods are thick with shapes and  
voices,

They crowd behind, in front,

Scarcely can one's wheels break through them.

For God's sake, drive quickly!

There are butchered victims behind those trees,

And what you say is moss I know is the dead hair of  
hanged men.

Drive faster, faster.

The hair will catch in our wheels and clog them;

We are thrown from side to side by the dead bodies in  
the road,

Do you not smell the reek of them,

And see the jaundiced film that hides the stars?

Stand on the accelerator. I would rather be bumped to  
a jelly

Than caught by clutching hands I cannot see,  
Than be stifled by the press of mouths I cannot feel.  
Not in the light glare, you fool, but on either side of it.  
Curse these swift, running trees,  
Hurl them aside, leap them, crush them down,  
Say prayers if you like,  
Do anything to drown the screaming silence of this  
    forest,  
To hide the spinning shapes that jam the trees.  
What mystic adventure is this  
In which you have engulfed me?  
What no-world have you shot us into?  
What Dante dream without a farther edge?  
Fright kills, they say, and I believe it.  
If you would not have murder on your conscience,  
For Heaven's sake, get on!

## CIRCUS TENTS BY LAKE MICHIGAN

I LOOKED from my window at the great lake,  
And Shakespeare, and Keats, and Whitman stood be-  
side my chair

And pointed out to me things I might not have seen.  
They bade me observe the feather lights lying upon  
the lake surface,

The blue enlarging upon a greater blue of the flat,  
approaching water,

The crispness of its line against the shore.

But the trains ran beneath my window, puffing and  
grinding,

And from the circus tents beyond the railroad tracks  
Came the incessant, teasing bleat of the heard notes of  
a brass band.

"Mr. Shakespeare," I urged, "be so kind as to re-  
peat what you just said,

I did not quite hear it.

And, Mr. Keats, say that once again, if you please, I  
wish to lose nothing."

Only Walt Whitman kept on speaking,

Rolling out words which swept through the noise like  
a heavy moon through clouds,

And his stretched arm pointed to the lake, cutting the  
tent in two, blotting out the middle flag.

So it went on all day,

And the poets withdrew, baffled,

And the circus tent swelled to a prodigious size and  
hung before me as all America.

And the sorrow of jungle animals wasting themselves  
upon sawdust entered my heart,

And the glory and grief of the trapeze artists and their  
useless perfection

Rasped my nerves with the prick of hail.

So it was all day,

And all day I watched and saw my country swallowed  
up by the huge tent,  
Far from trees, sweltering in a hot dust,  
Crying its delight cheaply and violently through the  
voices of peanut-men and clowns.

Night came, and the band droned on and bright lights  
glared in the tents.

I had ceased to think. I stared out of the window and  
beat time to the band on the arm of my chair.  
Beyond the tent, the great lake crouched in darkness,  
waiting.

I thought it waited to say a word to the caged, jungle  
animals,

To the trapeze artists who had cheated death another  
day.

I too waited until the tent lights went out,  
And the lighthouses shone, red and white, in even pul-  
sations,

Half-way up my black window.

And Shakespeare, and Keats, and Whitman came back  
and watched the turning lights with me,

Silently we watched them half-way up the window.

Then an elephant trumpeted, dreaming of water and  
lush trees,

And a jackal, forgetting his cage, howled to the smell  
of the creeping water,

And I wrote a poem for the trapeze artists which they  
will never read,

And showed it to my companions, who only nodded,

For they were watching the turning lighthouse lanterns,  
revolving red and white — red and white  
— slowly, evenly, half-way up the window.



## ST. LOUIS

JUNE

FLAT,

Flat,

Long as sight

Either way.

An immense country,

With a great river

Steaming it full of moist, unbearable heat.

The orchards are little quincunxes of Noah's Ark trees,

The plows and horses are children's toys tracing amus-  
ingly shallow lines upon an illimitable surface.

Great chunks of life to match the country,

Great lungs to breathe this hot, wet air.

But it is not mine.

Mine is a land of hills

Lying couchant in the angles of heraldic beasts

About white villages.

A land of singing elms and pine-trees.

A restless up and down land

Always mounting, dipping, slipping into a different  
contour,

Where the roads turn every hundred yards or so,

Where brooks rattle forgotten Indian names to tired  
farm-houses,

And faint spires of old meeting-houses

Flaunt their golden weather-cocks in a brave show of  
challenge at a sunset sky.

Here the heat stuffs down with the thickness of  
boiled feathers,

The river runs in steam.

There, lilacs are in bloom,

Cool blue-purples, wine-reds, whites,

Flying colour to quiet dooryards.

Grown year on year to a suddenness of old perfection,

Saying "Before! Before!" to each new Spring.

Here is "Now,"

But "Before" is mine with the lilacs,

With the white sea of everywhither,

With the heraldic, story-telling hills.

## THE REVENGE

ALL night I read a little book,  
A very little book it was.  
It had a pretty, shimmering look  
Like silver threaded into gauze.

I read it till the windows turned  
Into blue ghosts which stared at me.  
The fire tittered as it burned.  
A dwarfish sneer perched on my knee.

Who was it put the poison there?  
Who has conceived this hellish thing —  
To lay a sightless, soundless snare  
Amid its lovely whispering?

So gently came the rush of rhymes,

So lightly breathed the poison in —  
Who thinks of cinquecento crimes,  
White hellebore on jessamine?

I took that little shy, sleek book  
And set a crimson match to it.  
It crinkled like a freshet brook,  
And flaked and vanished, bit by bit.

There was no book my hands could hold,  
No book my eyes could ever see,  
But round my head it ran, a bold  
Ironical phylactery.

I cannot read the book again,  
But there's no need, it scalds my head,  
A strip of livid, living pain  
I shall not lose till I am dead.

For hate is old as eagle peaks,  
And hate is new as sunrise gulls,  
And hate is ravening vulture beaks  
Descending on a place of skulls.

Hate is a torch, hate is a spur,  
Hate will accomplish my design:  
The author's first biographer!  
I pray, O Hate, that task be mine.

I shall not need to criticize  
Nor look the subject up at all,  
But simply turn round both my eyes  
And gaze at my brain's inner wall.

There I shall see a fresco wreath  
Of letters moulded of dried tears,  
And annotated underneath  
The things I've thought and thought for years.

'Twill be a pleasant job, I think,  
To crumble up those dusty tears,  
And stir them thickly in my ink;  
Hate paid at last his long arrears.

My foot-notes will enrich the brew  
With colours I've brought back from Hell.  
I'll write down all I ever knew.  
By Satan's ears, I'll write it well!

By Satan's tongue! I'll tell the truth,  
And not one word will add to it,  
From his egregious, twisted youth  
To his last frozen torture fit.

I'll write down his biography  
So that the world will die of laughter.  
I'll pin him like a squirming fly,

A comic spasm of hereafter.

I'll make his sins a jig of mirth,  
His loves so many masterpieces  
Of high derision. I will dig  
Bare the cold roots of his caprices.

I'll sling about him every soul  
He squeezed and drained to give him drink.  
His wife gone mad — I'll make it droll.  
Bless the Hell colours in my ink!

I'll leave him not a decent rag  
Of tragedy to wrap about him.  
I'll hang him up as a red flag  
Till every street boy learns to shout him.

I've taken up a pretty whim,  
But, tit for tat, he had his chance.



And I may end by blessing him,  
My partner in this ghoulisn dance.

He slew me for a time, admitted;  
But I shall slay him for all time.  
Poor shrivelled clown whom I've outwitted,  
I pardon you your poisoned rhyme.

Go peacefully, for I have done  
With you and your false book is dead.  
There's sorrow, too, in having won.  
Go softly then, and go well sped.

## CHILL

I THOUGHT of myself as a walnut  
Hung above fallen leaves,  
Desperately clinging and jerking  
At the edge of a hollow wind.

I counted the leaves below me,  
Scuffling and grating together.  
I feared lest my withered stem  
Should drop me too soon upon them.

The hollow wind played music,  
Running over the branches.  
The sapless chords of the branches  
Whined a shrunken, glimmering tune.

The moon with a hump-backed shoulder

Shook a cloud off as though it were water,  
And her light dripped down like water  
Over the crackling leaves.

And shadows rose from the tree-trunks,  
Cocking their legs and their ankles,  
Dancing a dance of snapped elbows,  
Distorting the beds of the leaves.

The owls flew shrieking above them,  
Field-mice, their long tails twisted,  
Ran like an army of ants  
Gnawing and nudging each other.

And the wind played cymbals and tubas  
To the beat of a tarantella,  
Rocking in broken circles,  
Chaining the tops of the tree.

And I was the kettle-drum tapping,  
Tap-tapping my shell on the branch,  
Terribly pulled and contorted,  
Fearing the dance of the shadows.

Then there came to me the vision of a hepatica  
Standing thinly out of a mould of Winter leaves,  
Star-white, calling Good-morning to a soft sky.  
Gently swayed the white hepatica,  
Drinking the wet mould.  
I felt the roots streaming through it,  
I felt the moisture rising into the white petals.  
I saw the sun reach down and answer the bright  
    hepatica.

I loosened my stem and fell — fell —  
Into blackness,  
For the cloud had re-captured the moon.

## SNOW

It snowed yesterday,

And to-day I have been choked with the pale falling  
of snow.

It drops steadily,

Slowly,

Sliding in slant lines of white

Against green trees.

The trees burn through it

Like slabs of green water

Beneath the foam of a waterfall.

The trees are permanent and still,

The snow is permanent also,

Light as dust,

Grim as the heave of massed water,

Continuous as the beat of death.

A snow-flake on a path,

A foot treads upon it and it is gone.

Millions by millions of snow-flakes,  
And a hundred thousand people  
Struggle under a smooth, smothering desolation.  
In a bitter white twilight  
The snow creeps upon the city,  
Coming gently,  
Little crystals of no account  
Dropping down between solid houses.  
The warm streets melt it,  
But soon their power fails,  
The roadways disappear,  
The sidewalks sink and fade,  
From doorway to opposite doorway  
Lies a prairie of sudden snow.  
My rhododendron bushes  
Are single leaves gasping for air.  
My windows are dull eyes  
Gazing at a crushed heaven.  
The wind flings rattles of sneering laughter

Down the chimneys.

Once there was a sun;

I saw it weeks ago

Commanding a blue sky,

Driving the hours before it in a coloured, satisfactory  
procession.

Now there is no sky,

Merely a descending of grey particles,

Ordered, open,

A sequence of irony

Deftly possessing itself of the world.

Long ago,

On nights like this,

Wolves howled among these trees;

Now there is silence,

And the sibilant sifting murmur of the snow.

But I expect to hear the wolves,

I expect the house-roof to crumble

And leave me pushing against white drifts,

Chattering nonsense with a parched tongue,  
Gone mad with whiteness,  
Drowned under the feathers of the snow.  
There used to be sleigh-bells,  
Little shaken sprays of music,  
To make the snow human.  
Strong, friendly horses  
Trampling the storm with living sinews.  
Now —  
It slips,  
Slips,  
Cool,  
Still,  
Fragile and irrefragable,  
And I see it falling on a dead continent  
Where there is no more life,  
No more desire,  
Only the windless cold of an old planet  
Voyaging a perpetuity of stars.



## OLD SNOW

THE earth is iron,  
The winds are bands of steel,  
The snow is a pock-marked beggar-woman  
Crouching at a street corner  
Whining an old misery over and over.  
They say she was white once, and a virgin.  
But who remembers it —  
Seeing her lie indecently huddled upon an iron earth,  
Cringing under the strokes of the steel-band wind?

## NEW HEAVENS FOR OLD

I AM useless.

What I do is nothing,

What I think has no savour.

There is an almanac between the windows:

It is of the year when I was born.

My fellows call to me to join them,

They shout for me,

Passing the house in a great wind of vermilion banners.

They are fresh and fulminant,

They are indecent and strut with the thought of it,

They laugh, and curse, and brawl,

And cheer a holocaust of "Who comes firsts!" at the  
iron fronts of the houses at the two edges of the  
street.

Young men with naked hearts jeering between iron  
house-fronts,

Young men with naked bodies beneath their clothes  
Passionately conscious of them,  
Ready to strip off their clothes,  
Ready to strip off their customs, their usual routine,  
Clamouring for the rawness of life,  
In love with appetite,  
Proclaiming it as a creed,  
Worshipping youth,  
Worshipping themselves.

They call for women and the women come,  
They bare the whiteness of their lusts to the dead  
gaze of the old house-fronts,  
They roar down the street like flame,  
They explode upon the dead houses like new, sharp  
fire.

But I —

I arrange three roses in a Chinese vase:

A pink one,

A red one,

A yellow one.

I fuss over their arrangement.

Then I sit in a South window

And sip pale wine with a touch of hemlock in it,

And think of Winter nights,

And field-mice crossing and re-crossing

The spot which will be my grave.

## THE SIBYL

SHE was an aggressively unattractive old woman,  
Sitting there behind the table in the hotel corridor.  
Nothing could make her interesting or pathetic,  
Although to be on duty at midnight  
Proved her lot unfortunate.  
From her topknot of grey, escaping, withered hair  
To her fat, delaying hands,  
She precluded pathos;  
Even her melancholy attempt at finery,  
A faded imitation coral necklace,  
Seemed only dirty and dull.  
Hers was a hard lot indeed,  
Yet I could not pity her.  
I asked for a pencil.  
She gave me one, and grudged the doing it heartily.  
When I reached my room, I found that the pencil had  
a rubber on the end.

Cursed old sibyl!

What do you mean by uttering prophecies

At midnight,

In a hotel corridor!

## THE MADMAN

My house burnt down, I saw the stars  
Where a dull ceiling once had been.  
The smoky rafters stood like bars  
With glittering planets in between.

My neighbours came and saved the shell  
Of my burnt house. I took no heed.  
They called to me that all was well.  
I strid a rafter like a steed.

My neighbours stamped the flower beds,  
Imploring me to clamber down.  
And all the time above their heads  
The steady stars were like a crown.

I chirruped to my rafter horse

That he might flee across the sky,  
Gallop in a planet's course  
As I directed. Who was I?

I heard the shouts shot up at me,  
I heard the cry: "The man's a fool!"  
The rafter leapt amazingly  
Among the stars. The air was cool.

The stars ran swiftly past my ear.  
Chirping and chuckling, so they came.  
They whispered to me not to fear.  
I did not fear, the stars were tame.

They fawned and licked my hands and feet,  
I rode enwound in fondling stars.  
They grouped themselves to make a street,  
And Venus flew with me, and Mars.



Jupiter strode along ahead  
To push the crowding stars aside,  
And Mercury, with fluttering tread,  
Held back the rear that I might ride.

Now who would own a house of wood,  
Of clay, or even morticed stone?  
A hundred years I might have stood  
Under the ceilings hanging prone.

“Blest fire!” I thought, and dug my heels  
Into the rafter. On it slid.  
The stars were road-dust blown from wheels  
Behind my flight. I reached the lid.

There was the cover of the sky.  
I cried out to my rafter, “Stop!”  
It heeded not at all, and I  
Came bump against the awful top.

The shock deprived me of my breath  
And shuttlecocking down I went.  
A palsied thought that this was death  
Scattered my senses and I bent.

All huddled up upon my steed  
I clung, but with a swoop the rafter  
Dropped through my legs which could not speed  
So fast. I fell alone thereafter.

I fell and fell again. I fell  
For years and years. It was so dark  
I only knew the door of Hell  
Because it glowed with a red spark.

The stars had gone, the years had gone,  
A memory was all I had.  
I sat in a burnt dusk alone

And heard a voice say, "He is mad!"

Perhaps, thought I, it may be so,  
But it's a poor man who'll not pay  
For pleasures had when pleasures go.  
Thank Fortune, I'm not made that way.

They brought a wife and child to me  
And called them mine. The silly dolts!  
I turned my back upon their plea.  
They put me behind bars and bolts.

I did not care a tinker's damn  
For this or that. For I am he  
Who rode with stars, that's what I am,  
And will be to Eternity.

I've sold my life for one short night  
And it was worth the payment due.

A man has certainly a right  
To do as he desires to do.

They tell me 'twas my wife and child  
Who owned my life. But these are names  
I've never heard before. Who build  
Such flimsy lies can make no claims.

Fiddlesticks! fellows. Leave me be;  
Here or elsewhere, it matters not.  
Blinded by stars, I cannot see.  
A memory is all I've got.

Leave me alone to dree my weird.  
It always comes, the paying day.  
And I remember I once steered  
A rafter through a milky way.

## DIRGE

I LEFT her there in the rushes by the river,

Where the aspen leaves make a quiver — quiver —  
quiver —

And the breeze through the trees casts a silver shiver,  
I left her floating there.

She swore to die and I left her dead

For what I answered to what she said.

Was there anything I could have done instead?

Oh, the bitter, bitter beauty of her hair!

For days I had heard the call of the town.

But there was no need for her to drown.

Oh, the bubbles that came up as she went down,

And the creak of the displaced reeds!

Snakes of hair-strands mounting through the green,

Nosing past the reed-stems, catching in between,

And a pallid shadow like a sunken tambourine.

Was it she I saw in the weeds?

My boat drew out and drifted away,  
What was the need for me to stay?  
A drowned body is but water-logged clay.

I must pull for the night comes on.  
But the water spurns the oars off as though it were ice,  
The boat is held as if wedged in a vice.  
A gull cries once, a gull cries twice,  
And a fog conceals the sun.

Red water-snakes with glimmering eyes  
And bells on their tails, I see them rise  
Here, there, everywhere. A swart crow flies  
Croaking toward the shore.  
And fastened to the snakes are pale strange things  
With waving, weaving tentacles like arms, and rings  
Clinging tight and tidily to misty pencillings.  
I have seen those rings before.

Not one face, alone, nor two, nor three,  
But faces as many as the shells in the sea,  
Their lank jaws trailing beside them crookedly.

The river sighs and moans.

The tossing snakes are the hideous hair  
Sprung from these heads. And the white eyes glare  
At my boat stuck still in a musty air  
Jolted by the clatter of bones.

It's a lie! A lie! She wished to die,  
Could any one have stopped her? There was no time  
to try.

But the whimpering air seems to jellify.

My heart-beats slow and fail.

The bells on the snakes shrill an angelus.

The oily sky drips its yellow pus

Through the twilight — and I? You see me thus.

A murderer locked in jail.

But all of every night and all of every day

I see her body with the rushes sway,

And the needles of the sun in the disarray

Of her glorious, undulant hair.

Her face smiles at me through the cool, calm green

Of the water pool like a Florentine

Image set in lilies, but the lilies intervene.

I cannot reach her there.

Farewell, loveliest, azure-lidded, parted

By your misunderstanding and my wrath. Ah, eager-

hearted,

Prone to take offence at jests scarcely even started,

There you lie with hope.

Both lost together at a single turn.

Water soaks your eyes and brain, mine only burn.

Jailer put the clock on, upset the urn,

Be pitiful and hurry with the rope.



## ANECDOTE

## FIRST SOLILOQUY

HER breasts were small, upright, virginal;  
Even through her clothes I could feel the nipples  
pointing upward when I touched her inadvert-  
ently.

The chastity of her garments was pronounced,  
But no disposal of material could keep the shape of her  
breasts unseen.

And you would walk as a Spring wind,  
You would order your demeanour as though there were  
still frost in the air,

You would keep me to my distance by the cool agree-  
ableness of your speech.

You are foolish, Madam, or deceived.

Is it possible you underrate my sensibility

And do not realize that I hold your breasts  
In the hollow of my hand?

## SECOND SOLILOQUY

His voice was a dagger tipped with honey,  
His touch a scimitar dripping myrrh and gall.  
He parted me from myself  
And I stood alone in sunshine and trembled.  
I caught my garments about me,  
But they withered one by one as leaves wither, and  
fell.

I was alone in the wide sunlight;  
His eyes were winds which would not leave me.  
I would have sought a tree,  
But the place where I was was bare and light.  
Merciless light he shed upon me,  
And I stretched my arms in shame and rejoicing.

Why do you stand there watching me?  
Are you blind to what is really happening  
That you talk so lightly of trifles?  
Stop talking, you suffocate me.  
Does any one notice?  
Why do you strip me before all these people —  
You, who care nothing for my nakedness?  
Unbearable the anguish of my body,  
The ache of my breasts,  
The strain of covering myself is choking me.  
Why do you do nothing but talk?  
Have you no hands, no heart,  
Or are you so cynical that you expose me for a whim?  
Oh, I am well-trained, be sure of that,  
But can you not see through my pretense?  
It is agony to hold myself away from you,  
Yet you are as impassive as a stone Hermes before  
whom Venus herself would need no cloak.  
Now that you are gone, what have you left me?

No privacy at all, I think.

You have stolen my secrecy, and flung it back as something not worth taking.

I have only the harsh memory of your eyes,

Your dull, stone eyes which haunt me in the dark.

## EPITHALAMIUM IN THE MODERN MANNER

THE round, red moon ran a level eye along the hay-  
field,

Appraising conditions with a view to possibilities.

It was the moon's business to see that the shadows of  
the cocks were of sufficient size,

As a preliminary to the seasonable arrival of the next  
generation.

“To one enamoured of dragonflies,

What is a chip hat with a ribbon round it?

To one engrossed in a game of cribbage,

What is the importance of the Treaty of Ghent?”

Which shows that Archibald was in a naughty humour,  
And Joanna more than usually occupied with the  
counting of grass-blades.

The moon caught them in her long orange arms  
And jostled them together with so thorough a completeness •

That they fell, giggling, into a haycock shadow,  
As perfect a pair of young animals as need be  
For the maintenance of the species man on an ant-corroded planet.

## POINTS OF VIEW

YOUTH cocks his hat and rides up the street.

Age cocks his eye only to see it.

Youth puts his horse at a five-barred gate.

Age chuckles grimly and sits down to wait.

Youth limps by with a broken-kneed horse.

Age, through the shutters, mutters "Of course!"

Youth curses Fate for his splitting head.

Age lights the candle and hobbles to bed.

## SHOOTING THE SUN

FOUR horizons cozen me  
To distances I dimly see.  
Four paths beckon me to stray,  
Each a bold and separate way.  
Monday morning shows the East  
Satisfying as a feast.  
Tuesday I will none of it,  
West alone holds benefit.  
Later in the week 'tis due  
North that I would hurry to.  
While on other days I find  
To the South content of mind.  
So I start, but never rest  
North or South or East or West.  
Each horizon has its claim  
Solace to a different aim.



Four-soul'd like the wind am I,  
Voyaging an endless sky,  
Undergoing destiny.

## THE CUSTOMER

SHE came into my shop to-day,  
The old maid from across the way,  
With her pursed-up lips and disdainful mien  
And her walk, each step with another between.

Her mouth drew up above her nose,  
No wrinkles ever so sniffed as those.  
Her dress was too long, too short, too square,  
Each inch measured out with what should be there.

Her hair, a twisted wad of grey,  
Tipped her hat in the strangest way  
So that every angle hurt like a noise,  
There was discord in its very poise.

Her eyeglass crystals made her eyes  
Puff out to a prodigious size:

The opaque white of eggs much cooked  
Shone dully everywhere she looked.

She minced up to the counter, said:  
“I want three yards of ribbon — red.”  
Sat down upon a stool and waited.  
The tranquil atmosphere vibrated.

I bowed and brought a brilliant red,  
Flaming and smooth as though each thread  
Were new-run blood or molten glass.  
She gave one look and let it pass.

I brought her scarlet, a poppy shade  
Hot as a subaltern's cockade,  
It darted out between my hands  
Like a spurted flame of many strands.

She shook her head and murmured, “Crude.”

I brought her a damask whose lassitude  
Was of pale boudoirs and midday wakings;  
It slid from the roll in languid snakings.

Annoyed, she pushed it to one side.  
A clear carnation next I tried,  
Fresh as Spring wind. "Oh, no," said she,  
And tapped her foot impatiently.

I urged a cardinal crimson — she pouted.  
Magenta, vermilion — both were flouted.  
Carbuncle, ruby, cinnabar,  
The counter looked like a mad bazaar.

One was too dull, the next too gay,  
The next she fingered and turned away.  
I tried thin ribbons of madder and lake,  
Or wide russet sashes I hoped she would take.

I offered maroon with intriguing brightnesses,  
I tendered a cherry streaked with whitenesses.  
I gave her the claret of evening skies,  
The silver-salmon of faint sunrise.

I brought down carmine doubled with gold.  
I found pale buffs under which rolled  
A faint suggestion of watchet or blue.  
Nothing I showed her seemed to do.

I gave her plaid ribbons, chequered, shot.  
Always she asked what more I had got.  
I proffered striped satins, or grosgrain plain.  
Whatever it was, I must try again.

The uncoiled ribbons grew and grew  
Until I only saw her through  
A hole in the pile. But her voice came clear:  
“Have you no more, there is nothing here.”

I climbed down ladders with boxes balanced  
In either hand. Under the valanced  
Counters I dove for still more bolts.  
She pronounced all ribbon designers dolts.

Neither colour, nor texture, nor price would suit,  
She must see more. So to the root  
Of my stock I went, unwinding, displaying —  
Her chilly voice simply went on saying

That all was wrong, one way or another.  
I began to wonder if I should smother  
Under those rubicund twining strips,  
When wanly fell from the pursed-up lips:

“You have so little to choose from here,  
And what you have so excessively dear,  
I will take two packets of pins. Nothing more.”

And paying me she tripped through the door.

The sun was setting, the ribbons looked dull,  
The heap had assumed the form of a skull.  
The hollow eyes winked, the loose jaw made  
A grimace at the fool who sold beauty in trade.

The wind whispered under the shop-door sill,  
“Loveliness! Loveliness! Where you will.  
Make it, give it, but put it on sale,  
A bale of goods is only a bale.”

The primrose moon through the window-pane  
Misted the skull with saffron rain.  
Gold as a guinea it lured and shone  
At the tradesman standing there alone.  
From the old clock tower of carven stone  
The hour chimed in a hollow tone,  
Three peals of bells for a quarter past one.

## THE SEWING-BOOK

I'VE been reading a book about sewing,  
And I look at my useless hands,  
They know nothing at all of a needle's going  
Over and under through linen strands.

My hands are a foolish sort of toys,  
They can hold a pencil, that is all they know.  
Now, reading, they would aspire to the joys  
Of setting a thousand little stitches in a row.

A row of neat little stitches in some particularly fine  
cloth.

Cloth is perhaps sweeter than its grandchild — paper.  
But these clumsy hands of mine are worth  
Whatever value there is in a sky-scraper  
Hewn of cold clouds, airily morticed with grey vapour.



Nainsooks, linen-lawns and cambrics,  
Even mercerized cotton has an agreeable style  
In reading. My hands build towers of flame-bricks,  
But I burn in their fire all the while.

Imbroidering monograms is a cool pursuit, and  
stitching

A monotonous thing like a hem means rest  
I can quite believe, rest uninterrupted by the itching  
Torment to mold a weather-cock of fire into a crest.

Is a needle sharper than a pencil? That  
Hinges of course on this matter of hands.  
A cardinal may be weighed down by his hat,  
And a pencil weary for the smooth, white bands  
Of a linen cuff, perchance. There it stands,

Two or three spools of coloured thread,

And whatever flower comes into your head  
Blooms on the muslin tranquilly,  
Evenly patterned as a tree.  
I consume with a pencil's lead,  
Making a thought, a grief, a laughter.  
You will last while fibres hold fibres. I, dead,  
Tempt a future of nothing and nothing. No dafter  
Aim in the world than that what I have said  
May be seeded, harvested, ground into bread  
And so on hereafter, and that to be  
Till the hungry find nothing to eat in me,  
And no fit dwelling in my smouldering towers  
Only the crumbling of mouldy hours.  
Oh, the peace, the peace of your silken flowers!  
The smooth, white dust of your exquisite, faded  
flowers!

## STILL LIFE

## MOONLIGHT STRIKING UPON A CHESS-BOARD

I AM so aching to write

That I could make a song out of a chess-board

And rhyme the intrigues of knights and bishops

And the hollow fate of a checkmated king.

I might have been a queen, but I lack the proper  
century;

I might have been a poet, but where is the adventure  
to explode me into flame.

Cousin Moon, our kinship is curiously demonstrated,

For I, too, am a bright, cold corpse

Perpetually circling above a living world.

## BALLAD OF GRINNING DEATH

UPON a decent truckle-bed  
A woman lay, and she was dead.  
A curtain flapped before a pane  
Of glass made sharp and thick by rain.  
A mouse ran softly on the floor.  
Beyond the rattling attic door,  
A wind was moaning more and more,  
It wailed as waves against a shore.

A candle with a drowning wick  
Swaled in an old tin candlestick.  
A haggard man was writing there,  
Composing words with dreadful care.  
He ran his fingers through his hair,  
And sang a song which cut a glare  
Like purple lightning through the gloom

Of that wind-muffled, quiet room.

He sang: "Come, comrades, drink it up,  
The bubbling, beading, blazing cup,  
The licking, glittering serpent wine,  
Drink, Bully Boys, the candles shine,  
Women, and lights —" The strained voice cracked  
Upon a chilly sob which hacked  
The melody to bits, and left  
Only a poor old man bereft.

He rose and wavered through the room,  
His fingers struck upon the doom  
Of Death and rang a hollow sound  
As pulses beating round and round,  
All round and round, but in that place  
Where lay her tired, peaceful face,  
He knelt as in a neutral space.

He kissed the glassy hands, a moan  
Wrenched from him by their feel of stone;  
He passed his arms about the thin  
Old shrunken form and held it in  
His shivering grasp, and called her name,  
And told her it was he who came;  
He babbled love words, beating them  
Harshly against Death's frozen phlegm.

The rain struck loud upon the sash.  
Over the roof, the rain-drops' dash  
Drew thickly to a single fall  
Of water leaping down a wall.  
He must not pause, he could not wait,  
The hour was growing very late.  
The money for the funeral.  
He crept back to his blotted scrawl.

And there all night he wept and tore

Out of his bleeding mind a score  
Of rousing drinking-songs, that rang  
In obscene choruses, a clang  
Of goblets clattered through the staves,  
And on he wrote as one who raves:  
“Drink, Men, for wine is crowning sweet” —  
He dropped his head upon the sheet,  
He clutched his hands until the bones  
Stood out upon the skin like stones,  
And cursed God as a frantic child  
Screams at a dream. Then, weak and mild,  
He pleaded: “Do not leave me, Dear.  
Oh, Mary, Mary, can you hear?”  
The silence hissed upon his ear.

Then he would jerk upright and sing:  
“A ring-a-ding, a ring-a-ding.  
For brandy is a handsome thing.  
Ale is for toppers who have to be careful,

Claret for gentlemen grown somewhat fearful.  
Sherry for men with a long roll of yellows,  
But brandy and rum for the best of good fellows.  
Ho! Boys! Drinking boys,  
Clap your glasses and make a noise,  
Shouting brandy and rum, Ho! Ho! Ho!  
Calling for whiskey and gin." Below  
He heard the choking gutters spill,  
The wind beyond the door was shrill,  
The corpse beneath its sheet lay still.

To him this was not something dead,  
He did not know her so. Instead  
What lay there was his sleeping wife,  
The hair-spring of his dredged-out life,  
The reason why his dreams were good,  
The springing freshness of his blood.  
The edges of his life drew in  
And hung about him, curled and thin,



He felt himself an empty shell  
Swirled by a wind across a fell,  
And Heaven was just a sneer of Hell.

A near-by steeple rang a chime,  
For time is time, and passing time,  
And wearily he found a rhyme  
And nailed it to a loud-laughed jest.  
He cursed the man at whose request  
The drinking-songs were ordered. Then  
He rose and came to her again,  
And stood and stifled in his pain.

The near-by steeple chimed and tolled  
That life was old and songs were gold,  
And drinking-songs were red and sweet,  
And morning crawling down the street.  
He smoothed her quiet, quiet hair,  
He pulled the curtain so no glare

Should be upon her anywhere,  
Then took his songs and left her there.

Outside the wind blew sharp and strong.  
A dwindled sunlight fled along  
The endless streets. He ached for sleep,  
His eyes were eyes which may not weep.  
He had no thought about it all  
But money for a funeral.  
His brains were leaping in a fire  
To gratify her last desire.  
A hearse, a coffin, and a pall  
To give her decent burial.  
And then the snow began to fall.

## POETIC JUSTICE

DOUBLE-FLOWERING trees bear no fruit, they say,  
And I have many blossoms,  
With petals shrewdly whirled about an empty centre,  
White as paper, falling at a whiff of wind.  
But when they are gone  
There are only green leaves to catch at the sunlight,  
Green monotonous leaves  
Which hide nothing.

## TO FRANCESCA BRAGGIOTTI

AFTER SEEING HER DANCE: "FRAGRANCE"

WHITE —

As the dawn on white roses,

Bright —

As sunlight on your rope of roses;

As a feather tossed in the quick of the wind,

As a crystal figure swept by a rainbow rain.

Dancer of silver shadows,

You are all youth and freshness,

Like a sharp spear against ivy,

Like a bow pulled to quivering,

Like an arrow rushed from a shaking bow.

Your arms are gestures of a morning earth,

The arc of your leaping legs a shout of loveliness,

Your movements the shining silence of the on-coming  
sun.

You dance in the dawn,  
You dance over green lawns in a leaf-rhythm,  
Weaving patterns with your rope of roses,  
Printing a white, fleeting pattern of yourself,  
Of your bright body against sudden, startled green.

## DANCE FIGURE

I WOULD pray for thunder  
Clanging across a copper sky,  
For the scissors of the lightning  
Rending green clouds.

As a tempest in the tree-tops,  
I scream into the fiery wind;  
As rain, wing-footed,  
I fleet over dim valleys.

I am the silver of storm,  
The gold of shuddering mist-tissues  
Clouded about the head of that God  
Whose name is fury to the world.

Speak, joints,

Wrists, ankles, knee-sockets!  
Shout — arms, legs,  
Shoulder-reaches and finger-tips!  
Cry the song of an iron chariot  
Rolling wheel and wheel  
Along the wind tracks.

I leap in an angle of lightning.  
I bend, spring, glitter,  
Ripping the cloud-veils.  
Who has seen the passion of my heart?  
Are there eyes which can bear the sight of me  
Approaching in the darkness?

The black horses snort at my coming,  
The trees fling the roses of their leaves before me.  
Sing —  
While the leaves tear from the trees.  
I leap from the heavens —

Shall you not behold me?

Daughter of thunder and the flake of it,

The deep pools wait for me.

I am the flash of a single body

Shivering to a million reflections.

As the thunder walks upon the sky

With steps of brass and ochre,

So I walk,

Upon a tower where no light is,

Slightly gauzed,

A moon whose clouds escape her.

You who desire me,

Where are you that I may reach you?

For whom am I come

If not for you?



Thunder of midnight,

Thunder of the morning,

I have made my waist supple for you.

I have taught my hands an unknown cunning.

My legs are the pillars of a flowing sky.

Dance then,

You who are curved to receive me.

Fling a new shadow from my brightness.

I am as you would have me,

The breaker of moulds and medallions,

Fashioning all things to a heaviness of thunder,

To a glory of unquenchable lightnings,

Whose image shall endure

To everlasting time.

Torch of thunder,

You burn upon the mountains,

And the lesser peaks

Fly up with flame.

Dazzling torch of aconite and silver,

Blaze — flare —

Penetrate the chasms of the great rocks,

The clefts in the mountain sides.

O radiant valleys,

Catch fire and sing with it in your mouths!

Light is forever,

For the fire of the sky has no end.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thunder-dancer,

I am tranquil,

Tranquil.

Slow drops drip from the trees,

Unevenly falling.

Slowly, with the slow rain-drops,

Dance,

And sleep.

## JAZZ DANCE

How-do! How-do!

Pigeon-wing and toe.

Click your heels together

And away we go.

Snappin' our fingers

And slitherin' our feet,

Beatin' out a sugar tune

Sticky and sweet.

Grab your lovely lady

And whirl her off the floor,

Slip and slide her down the room,

Steer her up once more.

Hear the drums a-beatin',

But they're goin' awful slow.

Hit her up, you jazz-men,

We're sleepin' in this row.

What's the bones a-doin'

Blowin' on his thumbs?

Sets my ribs a-jiggin'

To hear them drums.

How-do! How-do!

Out there in the night

All the birds am listenin'

And quiverin' with fright.

I reckon they 'low it's Judgment come

Them rattles is makin' such a terrible hum.

Don't you hear the sizzlin' out in the grass?

It's snakes, Honey, snakes, all a-hustlin' to pass.

They thinks we's devils, with the bawlin' and yellin',

An' they've only got a minute to run away from Hell  
in.

Watch me playin' possum,

Slinkin' through the crowd.

Peek past the folks, Lamb,

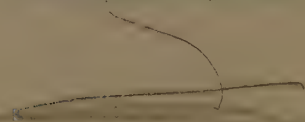
Ain't yo' proud

When I leap up sudden  
On a great round swing  
With the flicker-flap-flash  
Of a woodpecker's wing?  
'Pears like you  
Is a honeysuckle flower  
Smellin' like a bunch of 'em  
After a shower.  
'Pears like you  
Is a great gold queen  
Settin' on a high throne  
All red an' green.  
These here niggers  
Am just yo' people,  
But I am yo' fancy-man  
Tall as a steeple,  
With my head in the clouds  
Bobbin' roun' an' roun',  
An' my feet rejoicin'

At the boom-boom sound.  
Step along with me, Honey,  
What's the music for?  
Your little fire-feet am cracklin',  
Snappin' on the floor.  
They'm scorchin' my toes  
An' burnin' my eyes  
An' shootin' an' scootin'  
Like they was fire-flies  
All a-razzle an' a-dazzle  
An' a whirligiggin' wonder,  
Mockin' the old jazz drums  
Poundin' there like thunder.  
Don't you keep me waitin',  
Ain't I achin' to begin,  
Itchin' for it, Lady Bird,  
Like it was a sin.  
Your wild-cat eyes is callin' me  
They'm clawin' at my face,

I can't stand still no longer,  
Jump in an' take your place.  
Tickle up your shins, Girl,  
Look mighty smart.  
Grab me round the waist and — Whoo!  
There we start.  
How-do! How-do!  
Throw your little heels so,  
Same as colts do, that's the style.  
Double shuffle for a mile.  
Swing your hips and bend your head.  
Say, the music's all gone dead.  
Beat your drums up, player-men,  
Do that cake-walk reel again.  
Shake the tambourines a bit,  
Bang the cymbals till they split,  
Throw your drum-sticks up and catch 'em.  
We can bunny-jump to match 'em.  
Whirl your rattles to a spin,

Prod the fiddler with a pin,  
That ole nigger's pow'ful lazy,  
~~Makes us all go just plumb crazy.~~  
Do you hear that shudderin' whine?  
There's an owl in the old pine.  
Guess he's lonesome all out there  
Nothin' roun' but just cold air.  
~~My!~~ it's hot in here an' steamy.  
Makes my head go kind of creamy  
Seein' that great big flat moon  
Galivantin' roun' in tune  
Every time we pass the door.  
Shoot away now down the floor,  
Dizzy, whizzy, loo-for-Lizzie,  
Buckle-rappin', tap-tap-tappin'.  
Guess my bones am gwine to loosen,  
Guess I can't no more be choosin',  
Guess I'll dance till Kingdom come,  
Guess I need a drop of rum.





Holy Moses! hold me tighter,  
'Pears the moon am growin' whiter.  
Drum, you niggers, skin yo' wrists,  
Ain't we done a heap o' twists!  
How-do! How-do!  
Heel and toe,  
Forty couples in a glow,  
Eighty rose-bud hearts a-quakin'.  
Looks it might be dawn a-breakin'!  
How-do! How-do!  
Pigeon-heel and rabbit-toe,  
Till the candles all burn low  
And the drums am tellin' sleepy  
Tappin' ghosty-short an' creepy,  
An' a bluejay up an' screeches  
Outside in the purple beeches.  
Kiss me, Honey, that's all right.  
Maybe I'll be round to-night.

## PROPER INVECTIVE

FOLLOWED BY AN ARIA OF IRONIC CONSEQUENCE

RUST, moth, fungus, canker-worm,  
Hemlock, nightshade, Upas tree,  
All the horrors that there be  
Loose upon this pachyderm.

Gods of grottoes, caves, and mountains,  
Oracles and visions dire,  
Spirits of the air and fire.  
Dryads, naiads, nymphs of fountains.

Leave your eagle crags and eyries,  
Fly your apple-leaved seclusions,  
Bring your dreadfulest confusions,  
Mumbled magic misereres.

Spell, and curse, and incantation  
Heap upon this froward man,

Every charm and patteran  
Use to his complete damnation.

Call in wizards, witches, seers,  
With their lore of plant and planet,  
Bid them forge a charm of granite  
Lasting for a thousand years.

Bid them pick the square-stemmed briars  
Out of swamps where vapours ooze,  
Watch the faggots that they choose,  
Proper for their magic fires.

Watch them come by one and one,  
With the fog-web in their hair,  
And their yellow eyes astare,  
Bearing treasures hardly won.

Slowly tramping round about

The red cauldron, in they drop  
Mince and morsel, sip and sop,  
Rabbit's paw or weasel's snout.

Snakeskin sloughed at middle moon,  
Hair of brindled, five-toed cat,  
Spotted burdock which a rat  
Gnawed where frosty gibbets croon.

Tail of skunk and owlet's ear,  
Earthworms dugged from a Jew's grave,  
Splinter of a coffin stave  
Nicked from off a miser's bier.

Roots of adder's tongue, and yew  
Stripped at dawn on Easter even.  
"Seven, seven, seven, seven,  
Seven stars which buzzed and flew.

Seven devils, flying, dipping,  
Diving round the weather-cock  
Of the church, while tolls the clock  
Seven long strokes without skipping."

Infant's finger singed and brittle  
Stuck upon a dragon's fang,  
And, to give the brew a tang,  
Seven drops of blindman's spittle.

Rumble, rumble, stir the stew  
Round and round in widdershins,  
Faster, faster, till it spins.  
But there's more I'd have you do.

Summon Gods of Ind and Indies:  
Thoth, Sesostris, Voodoo, Bel,  
With their sorceries from Hell  
And their weird outlandish shindies.

Sibyls, with your erudition,  
Read him all the sooth and sin  
Under his name written in  
Your long records of perdition.

Ancient oracles declaim  
Fates concealed in dream and trance,  
Tragic jests of circumstance.  
Speak them smoothly like a flame.

Every rune and every rite  
Shower on him, spare not one,  
Till from sun to rising sun  
Never lived a sadder wight.

Let the spinning shapes of mist  
Lure him to high rocky edges  
Over surfy seas, let sedges

Hide the river's sudden twist.

Urge him with the voice of lovers  
Into fenny bogs and quakes  
Where the tufted marsh-mud shakes  
And a green light swoops and hovers.

Elves and pixies, pique him, prick him,  
Knot the grass to trip his feet.  
Goblin, djinn, and black afreet  
Pommel, pound, confuse, and kick him.

Star his darkness thick with faces,  
Mewing, mouthing, white as yeast;  
Bloody lips on which ghouls feast  
Leer at him with foul grimaces.

Beetles, bugs, and dragon-flies,  
Sting him with your poisoned stings,

Crawling fogs fold your cold wings  
Round about his arms and thighs.

Itching fevers, let him be  
Your most constant bourn, attend him  
With such pangs that they may send him  
Forthright to Eternity.

\* \* \* \* \*

So far done! O Warlocks, Witches,  
Thanks. And Gods of cloud and mountain,  
And ye nymphs of tree and fountain,  
Upland wold and leafy ditches,

I am gratitude unending.  
Flit back to your woods and caverns,  
Your high palaces, and taverns  
Under junipers down bending.

I will lay you jars of wine



At the entrance to your grottoes,  
I will carve the trees with mottoes:  
Aspen, birch, and scowling pine.

Not a wind shall blow between them  
But my words will show the brighter,  
Cut through bark to wood that's whiter.  
Everyone will soon have seen them.

Everyone will pilgrimage  
To your mountains and your rills,  
Trampling down the daffodils,  
Hauling marble for a stage.

Column, court, and colonnade  
Will appear by due degrees,  
Overhung with locust-trees  
Casting purple pools of shade.

Medals, coins, and carven gems  
Will be dropped into your shallows,  
Chequered by the brooding sallows  
With their pink and silver stems.

Youths and maidens wreathed in crocus  
Will parade your solemn larches,  
Pruned and fashioned into arches  
With the temple as their focus.

All because, you Ancient Spirits,  
Sibyls, Oreads, and Elves,  
Hoary Gods, you gave yourselves,  
Each with his peculiar merits,

To avenge a mortal who  
Had received a grievous slight  
From a witty, witless wight.  
Tell no one what I tell you.

Priests and Vestals shall not know  
Why this temple stands to prove  
My high gratitude and love.  
Why I have proclaimed you so.

Listen then, to solemn truth,  
In the arrogance of youth,  
What that fellow dared to do:  
Write a long, adverse review!

See now, in my rage and rancour,  
Goaded by tormenting canker,  
What I've done. It might be worse.  
Founding creeds upon a curse  
Is no new thing, you'll admit.  
Take what is and build on it,  
Be obliged with what you find,  
Wisdom does not pry behind

Any curtain hung between  
What is now with what has been.  
If you do not wish to see  
Your fine temple utterly  
Doomed and ruined, never tell.  
Gods and oracles, farewell.

## DISSONANCE

FROM my window I can see the moonlight stroking the  
smooth surface of the river.

The trees are silent, there is no wind.

Admirable pre-Raphaelite landscape,

Lightly touched with ebony and silver.

I alone am out of keeping:

An angry red gash

Proclaiming the restlessness

Of an incongruous century.

## THE BOOK OF STONES AND LILIES

I READ a book  
With a golden name,  
Written in blood  
On a leaf of flame.

And the words of the book  
Were clothed in white,  
With tiger colours  
Making them bright.

The sweet words sang  
Like an angel choir,  
And their purple wings  
Beat the air to fire.

Then I rose on my bed,

And attended my ear,  
And the words sang carefully  
So I could hear.

The dark night opened  
Like a silver bell,  
And I heard what it was  
The words must tell:  
"Heaven is good.  
Evil is Hell."

The night shut up  
Like a silver bell.  
But the words still sang,  
And I listened well.

I heard the tree-winds  
Crouch and roar,  
I saw green waves

On a stony shore.

I saw blue wings

In a beat of fire.

My hands clutched the feathers

Of all desire.

I cried for hammers,

For a hand of brass,

But my soul was hot

As melted glass.

Then the bright, bright words,

All clothed in white,

Stood in the circle of the silver night,

And sang:

“Energy is Eternal Delight.

Energy is the only life.”



And my sinews were like bands of brass,  
And the glass of my soul hardened and shone  
With all fires, and I sought the ripeness of sacrifice  
Across the dew and the gold of a young day.

## STALACTITE

I AM a dead thing,  
A brittle mummy swathed in canvas,  
Gazing with cracked, painted eyes  
At a high dome above a still hall.  
There is thunder,  
And I hear it;  
There is lightning,  
And I see the tongues of it;  
There are many bodies beside mine,  
And I see them too.  
I died a thousand years ago,  
And yet I remember long since,  
Drifts of ages since,  
Watching,  
With other eyes than these,  
Diana gathering white poppies upon a seaside hill.

## THE SPLENDOUR FALLS FROM CASTLE WALLS

*(Adapted from Tennyson)*

THE windows of the gallery  
Are tall, with rounded tops, so high  
They cramp the ceiling. Through their panes,  
Fogged and streaked with dust and rains,  
An August sunshine slants and veers  
Over the walls and the chandeliers  
Of faceted crystal, but scarce a gleam  
Can these give back, the ancient dream  
Of dust is on them. The sunlight floats  
On a stream of dust, the dropping motes  
Sift like mist through the empty room  
Filling it with a golden bloom.  
The moth-eaten velvet of the chairs  
Placed along the walls in pairs  
Is pitilessly obvious,  
The gilded arms and legs are worse,

Scaled to the wood. All is hushed and bright,  
An ancient splendour crushed with light,  
An aristocratic refinement, lying  
Bare to the eyes in the act of dying.  
Not a sound from the courtyard, not a bang  
From a distant door. The pictures hang  
Undisturbed, the scenes they show  
All occurred so long ago  
They are nothing to nothing.  
But how fresh the paint  
Upon armoured hero and martyred saint.  
How steadily the pennants curl  
From the masts of battleships! How they whirl,  
The javelins on that brazen gate!  
Here is passion coagulate,  
Stiffened at its highest flux,  
An agony not worth the chucks  
Of a copper-coin, or the bandolier  
Of a sixteenth century cavalier.

What knots of roses these battles were  
To the painter commissioned to disinter  
A thousand graves and decorate  
One general at his moment of spate.  
How gaily and safely they plied their trade,  
Turning a fight to a harlequinade,  
A holocaust to a pirouet.  
What of the blood, the groans, the sweat,  
The squeal of wounded horses, the cries  
Of disembowelled companies —  
What, think you, becomes of these  
On his commissioned canvases?  
Blow the trumpet! Bang the drum!  
Tootle the fife! The armies come  
Home from the wars, and what did they  
Do there, painter, can you say?  
Of course he can, he's the man to tell  
What he's never seen, he imagines so well.  
In his picture, cavalry advance

To the jaws of cannon, so sprightly a prance  
Shows the rose-wreath courage of horses and men.  
One cannon ball has just slain ten,  
Another is bursting like a rocket  
An inch beyond the embroidered pocket  
Of a gold-laced gentleman, unconcerned  
By the fact that his uniform may be burned.  
His noble horse, on hind legs only,  
Dashes ahead of the troop in lonely  
Magnificence. Earthworks bar the way,  
But what of that? This is Malplaquet  
With Marlborough rampant. Hooray! Hooray!  
I am almost inclined to toss my hat  
Up on a chandelier for that.  
Such a roseate riot of marshal exploit!  
A leader so bold, well-dressed, and adroit  
At high-school horsemanship, one of the true bits  
Of earth's tempered metal; why even his cubits  
Outspan those of any behind him that drew bits

And gave him his distance to open the breach  
In fiery solitude. What do they teach?  
"Marlbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre!" Such is speech;  
Even I am ignited.

A curious sound,  
Something between a step and a pound,  
Startles my trance. A man comes in,  
A pallid person, and so thin  
His bones crook the angles of his dress.  
He limps, poor soul, and his breathlessness  
Is pitiable, after his climb  
Up the slippery stairs. It is closing time  
He tells me dully. But I beg  
Him to sit and rest. His wooden leg  
Is a heavy burden, I suppose.  
He shakes his head and slowly goes  
On his round of closing the high windows.  
"It's nothing, Sir, I've got the use  
Of this timber now. They cooked my goose

When they conscripted me. If I'd known  
In time I'd have broke my leg with a stone  
Rather than this. I've a churlish bed  
To lie on, but what's done is done," he said.  
A miserable philosophy  
To catch a man so young as he.  
I risked a question gingerly.  
"Yes, Sir, a wife and youngster, so  
I got this job. It's all I can do.  
Damn beastly business, war!" He spat  
A curse or two, and after that  
He moved to show me out, but when  
I asked his age, he spat again  
Another curse: "That's it, Sir, see,  
I'm only just gone twenty-three."  
I gave him silver. His stump came fainter  
Round the corner of the kitchen wing.  
Coincidence is an eery thing —  
As I walked away, I damned that painter.



# SONGS OF THE PUEBLO INDIANS



## SONGS OF THE PUEBLO INDIANS

## I

## WOMEN'S HARVEST SONG

I AM waving a ripe sunflower,

I am scattering sunflower pollen to the four world-  
quarters.

I am joyful because of my melons,

I am joyful because of my beans,

I am joyful because of my squashes.

The sunflower waves.

So did the corn wave

When the wind blew against it,

So did my white corn bend

When the red lightning descended upon it,

It trembled as the sunflower

When the rain beat down its leaves.

Great is a ripe sunflower,  
And great was the sun above my cornfields.  
His fingers lifted up the corn-ears,  
His hands fashioned my melons,  
And set my beans full in the pods.  
Therefore my heart is happy  
And I will lay many blue prayer-sticks at the shrine  
of Ta-wa.

I will give corn to Ta-wa,  
Yellow corn, blue corn, black corn.  
I wave the sunflower,  
The sunflower heavy with pollen.  
I wave it,  
I turn it,  
I sing,  
Because I am happy.

## II

## BASKET DANCE

Dance!

Dance!

The priest is yellow with sunflower meal,

He is yellow with corn-meal,

He is yellow as the sun.

Dance!

Dance!

His little bells are ringing,

The bells tinkle like sunlight,

The sun is rising.

Dance!

Dance!

Perhaps I will throw you a basket,

Perhaps I will throw you my heart.

Lift the baskets, dancing,

Lower the baskets, dancing,  
We have raised fruits,  
Now we dance.  
Our shadows are long,  
The sunlight is bright between our shadows.  
Do you want my basket?  
Catch it!  
Catch it!  
But you cannot catch me,  
I am more difficult.

### III

#### WOMEN'S SONG OF THE CORN

How beautiful are the corn rows,  
Stretching to the morning sun,  
Stretching to the evening sun.  
Very beautiful, the long rows of corn.

How beautiful is the white corn,  
I husk it,  
I grind it.  
Very beautiful, my white corn.

How beautiful is the red corn,  
I gather it and make fine meal,  
I am glad doing this.  
Very beautiful, my red corn.

How beautiful is the black corn,  
I give it to my father,  
To my mother,  
I give it to my child.  
Very beautiful, the black corn.

How beautiful is the mottled corn,  
Like the sky with little clouds,  
I eat it looking at the sky.

Very beautiful, my mottled corn.

#### IV

##### PRAYER FOR A PROFUSION OF SUNFLOWERS

Send sunflowers!

With my turkey-bone whistle

I am calling the birds

To sing upon the sunflowers.

For when the clouds hear them singing

They will come quickly,

And rain will fall upon our fields.

Send sunflowers!

#### V

##### PRAYER FOR LIGHTNING

My corn is green with red tassels,

I am praying to the lightning to ripen my corn,

I am praying to the thunder which carries the light-



Corn is sweet where lightning has fallen.  
I pray to the six-coloured clouds.

## VI

## FLUTE-PRIEST SONG FOR RAIN

*Ceremonial at the Sun Spring*

Whistle under the water,  
Make the water bubble to the tones of the flute.  
I call the bluebird's song into the water:  
Wee-kee! Wee-kee-kee!  
Dawn is coming,  
The morning star shines upon us.  
Bluebird singing to the West clouds,  
Bring the humming rain.

Water-rattles shake,  
Flute whistles,  
Star in Heaven shines.

I blow the oriole's song,  
The yellow song of the North.  
I call rain clouds with my rattles:  
Wee-kee-kee, oriole.  
Pattering rain.

To the South I blow my whistle,  
To the red parrot of the South I call.  
Send red lightning,  
Under your wings  
The forked lightning.  
Thunder-rattles whirl  
To the sky waters.  
Fill the springs.  
The water is moving.  
Wait —

Whistle to the East  
With a magpie voice:

Wee-kee! Wee-kee-kee!

Call the storm-clouds

That they come rushing.

Call the loud rain.

Why does it not come?

Who is bad?

Whose heart is evil?

Who has done wickedness?

I weep,

I rend my garments,

I grieve for the sin which is in this place.

My flute sobs with the voice of all birds in the water.

Even to the six directions I weep and despair.

Come, O winds, from the sides of the sky,

Open your bird-beaks that rain may fall down.

Drench our fields, our houses,

Fill the land

With tumult of rain.

7771 6







BOUND BY  
SCHILLER BOOK BINDERY  
11th at F San Diego, Cal.



SAN DIEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

